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ABSTRACT

In 1973, compulsory province-wide grade 12 examinations, administered in Alberta since 1906, were dropped; teachers were given the responsibility of assigning final grades. Mandated by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in 1976, this study by the Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement (MACOSA) surveyed education professionals, students, and the public to answer two basic questions: (1) What is happening to the quality of education since these exams were dropped? and (2) What should happen? The first section of the study report, An Audit of the Facts, examines existing school system evaluation practices, policies, and grading trends, within local systems and province-wide. The second section, An Audit of Public's Opinions, discusses the survey instrument, population surveyed, questionnaire returns, treatment of data and interview techniques; and presents and interprets the resulting data. The third section, Interpretations of Publics' Opinions, discusses the positions taken by each of the ten groups sampled in the survey and by the interviewees, with respect to future practices in evaluation. The final section presents conclusions of the study regarding various interpretations for quality of education and the MACOSA recommendation regarding the new system of student evalution. Since there is reluctance to return to the compulsory examinations, it is recommended that the current policy be continued, subject to review after three years. (CP)

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Alberta Grade 12
Examination Study

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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A study commissioned by

The Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement (MACOSA)

Fred J. Dumont,
Study Director

November, 1977

Alberta

The Minister's Advisory Committee
on Student Achievement

CONDENSED VERSION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study, funded and administered by the Planning and Research Branch, Alberta Education, was conducted as a series of interrelated and sequential sub-projects: literature searches, policy document analyses, examination and synthesis of local, regional and provincial mark trend studies, questionnaire survey and personal interviews. Many, many individuals contributed to these activities.

The Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement (MACOSA) first wishes to acknowledge the yeomen efforts of the members of the Study Steering Committee which met numerous times and provided advice and direction to Fred J. Dumont, who conducted the study.

The willing participation of the many Alberta citizens, and administrative units and staff associated with the schools selected to participate, is acknowledged with deep appreciation.

A number of other people, too numerous to mention, deserve thanks and appreciation. These include officials of Alberta Education, Alberta Treasury, Alberta Municipal Affairs, and the Regional Offices of Education.

To all of the above, and to others not mentioned who contributed to the study, MACOSA expresses appreciation.

AMPLIFIED REPORT FORMAT

The amplified report has nine sections organized into two volumes, each with two parts. Volume I addresses the "WHAT IS" question of the study. Volume II looks at the "WHAT OUGHT

TO BE" component.

Part I of Volume I examines the "hard" evidence to ascertain whether or not what is purported to have happened to grade 12 marks since 1973, did happen. As an introduction, the report describes why the study was undertaken and points to the limitations imposed by the study's investigative techniques. A section is devoted to presenting an historical sketch of provincial government involvement in evaluation of student achievement, and to a summary of existing school system evaluation policies and practices. The third section provides a synthesis of local and provincial studies of trends in mark allocation to high school students, particularly at the grade 12 level and presents a summary statement about the evidence examined.

Part II of Volume I discusses in three sections what the publics think has happened to the "quality of education" since the old days of departmentals. First, research methods utilized to assess public opinion are presented. A second section discusses and interprets what the publics said. A selection of typical comments made by the participants is included to provide the reader with a reasonable sample of "what was said".

The third section is a series of appendices containing tables and reports referred to in the text of the study.

Part I of Volume II examines what corrective measures the publics feel are needed and contains tables reporting what each group thought ought to be done. Part II, being the final section of the report, presents the study's answers to the question posed by the Legislative Assembly, MACOSA conclusions and recommendation, and contains tables reporting what each group thought ought to be done.

Limited quantities of the complete report

described above have been printed.

A copy of the technical report has been filed with the Planning and Research Branch, Alberta Education, and might be of special interest to those wanting complete technical and descriptive information about the research methods used to address the question. This document is available on a loan basis only.

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SECTION I

BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

If enough people perceive a problem, a problem exists - either in fact or in perception.

ORIGIN OF THE STUDY

In October 1976, the Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement (MACOSA) was established in response to growing concerns about the level of student achievement in Alberta. MACOSA was charged with studying the elements of student achievement including definition, purposes, principles underlying achievement, consideration of ways and means to assess, maintain and improve student achievement, and to make recommendations based on findings. As a special assignment from the Legislative Assembly, one of MACOSA's first projects was a study to "assess the effects of the non-compulsory nature of grade 12 departmental examinations on student achievement in Alberta".

A Steering Committee was established in January 1977, to oversee the designing, commissioning and completion of the study.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The study was designed to respond to a motion of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, October 19, 1976, which requested that an investigation be undertaken to determine whether the change to non-compulsory grade 12 departmental examinations has affected the quality of education in Alberta. In fulfilling its mandate, the study approached the question on

three fronts: (a) A review was taken of possible changes in the distribution of grades given by schools in grade 12 subjects in the last five years; (b) A survey was made of local school system policies and practices on high school student evaluation; (c) A sample of opinions was taken regarding what has happened since compulsory provincial examinations were dropped. As a logical extension of its basic assignment the study looked at the question of what ought to happen regarding evaluation of student achievement particularly at the grade 12 level. Hence, the report while responding to the question from the Legislative Assembly, also contains a recommendation as to future practice relative to the question.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The concept of "quality of education", the instruments developed to measure it, and conclusions drawn from reading the test results, are capable of eliciting lengthy debates from all sectors of society. Few definitive answers about what "quality of education" really means have resulted from these discussions. It is alleged that the qualities developed in a student "which really count in the long run", are too tough to measure, so have been generally ignored by educators. Some examples might be intellectual curiosity and ability to get along with others. However, there is general agreement on one point. That is, achievement scores are important and represent one measure of "what it takes" to become a competent adult.

Nature of Mandate

The study recognized that "quality of education" is a very broad concept. Compulsory grade 12 examinations can readily measure only certain aspects, those commonly referred to as "standards of achievement". However, the presence or absence of provincial examinations has a wide ranging effect on education, going beyond the effect on "standards".

The study attempted to address both aspects of the problem, although the nature of the mandate required especially careful consideration to the matter of student achievement standards.

Survey Instrument

The instrument used to gather opinions was a direct mail questionnaire. Recognized weaknesses of that method of data gathering imposed limitations on the findings.

Population Sampled

The study was limited to the views of the persons from ten province wide groups. At various times the inclusion of a sample of post secondary school students was considered, but this group of students was not included specifically, other than by chance in the public at large sample.

Mark Allocation

The study hypothesized that the absence of external controls on school evaluation practices might lead to increased leniency in the evaluation of student performance.

Setting

The study is set in the Alberta context. The data were gathered during the first half of the 1977 year. If the social climate which is basic to the views of respondents were to change, presumably the data might also change.

SECTION II

SCHOOL SYSTEM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR EVALUATION OF GRADE 12 STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

HISTORICAL REVIEW

In a press release on February 3, 1973, the then Minister of Education, the Honorable Lou Hyndman, announced the withdrawal of compulsory grade 12 departmental final examinations and that the teachers would be responsible for assigning "final grades in all courses, for all students".[1] In making the announcement, the Minister stated that: "the local teacher is in an excellent position to evaluate student achievement. A single outside examination just doesn't have the breadth or depth to measure a year's work".[2] Following this announcement, a number of Department of Education directives were sent out to all school boards and school superintendents [3] granting province-wide accreditation with respect to evaluating grade 12 students' final marks provided certain criteria were met by the school. However, school systems were advised that departmental examinations would continue to

be available for the following purposes: (a) For students who wish to apply for certain scholarships. where it is indicated that a departmental examination is required; (c) For students who are taking high school matriculation subjects through private study; (d) For adults who have no means of obtaining a school mark. [4]

Since 1905, the Alberta government has had a mandate to provide education for Alberta students [5] and with this the responsibility to see that the schools are fulfilling the expectations of the electorate. A system of monitoring education in schools was deemed necessary to make certain that standards in education were maintained and that inconsistencies across school systems regarding student achievement evaluations were avoided, thus supposedly enhancing public confidence in the local schools. Until the early 70's therefore, when the last compulsory departmental examinations were eliminated, the legitimization of educational standards was done by the government through an extensive system of external examinations, and inspections by provincially appointed school inspectors. When Alberta decided to abandon this system of monitoring, it was the last Canadian province to do so.

Rusnack [6], (1975) in a report on Evaluating Education in Alberta's Schools described in some detail the development of evaluation in terms of; (a) what existed in the province from 1905 to 1939, (b) changes from 1940 to 1968, (c) changes from 1969 to 1973, and (d) what existed in education evaluation in 1974 and 1975. The report notes that since the early history of education in Alberta, the government had established centralized power and authority regarding the evaluation of students and schools, but that in the late 60's and early 70's much support for more local autonomy in

matters of student evaluation was growing in educations circles in Alberta. In support of this statement, Rusnack [7] makes the following pertinent observations:

> Recommendationsfrom the Cameron Commission Report of 1959 favored a system of accreditation by school systems for Grades I to XI. The report further supported the ideas of those school systems in Alberta which qualify for accreditation status being granted local autonomy in matters of course curriculum and student evaluation. When it came to the Grade XII matriculation level subjects the Cameron Commission Report still favored the retention of external departmental examinations in all schools. In 1960, the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA) favored a system of accreditation and favored it being phased in over a number of years. The ATA task force also favored the retention of external departmental examinations at the Grade XII level and further favored local autonomy in course curriculum and student evaluation throughout Grades I to XI.
>
> In 1963, the Alberta government announced legislation of the Accredited School Districts Act. This Act allowed a board of trustees of a city school district with a ten thousand plus student population to apply for accreditation status. Local autonomy was granted to acceptable school districts for curriculum, tests, and evaluation.
>
> The High School and University Matriculation Examinations Board also favored accreditation as seen by policies which allowed teachers more freedom and say in students' final grades. For example, in 1970, English 30 teachers' school marks accounted for approximately one-quarter of the students' final grade. Eventually, and effective June 1971, teachers' school marks constituted approximately 50% of the student's final grade in all Grade XII matriculation subjects.

The Worth Commission on Educational

Planning favored the concept that external departmental examinations at the grade 12 level change their role from compulsory student examinations to power tests to be used by the school systems at their own discretion. The suggested role of the school would be to evaluate the student with respect to ability and course content while that of the Department of Education, using standardized achievement power tests, would be to evaluate achievement levels across the province setting up Alberta norms in all subjects and grade levels.

The establishment of regional offices of education throughout Alberta in 1972 decentralized some of the authority of the Department of Education to local areas. The task of evaluating schools was assumed by these offices. School evaluations became voluntary at the request of the schools. During this time period, grade 9 and 12 departmental examinations were eliminated. Rusnack [8] speculates that the major reasons for government withdrawal from this method of monitoring schools were as follows:

> (a) they tested only the academic subjects
> (b) teachers were more qualified to assess student achievement at the local level, and
> (c) the examinations in the multiple-choice form, were limited in what they could test.

Resulting from the elimination of the departmental examinations were:

> (a) the loss of provincial consistency in assessing student achievement, and
> (b) universities were forced into setting their entrance requirements based on school assessment rather than departmental grades. In the past, there was a major emphasis on departmental examinations for screening stu-

dents for entering university. With the expansion of programs in the schools and at colleges and technical institutions the emphasis on teaching for university was diminished.

SCHOOL SYSTEM POLICIES ON GRADE 12 STUDENT EVALUATION

Introduction

Approximately one year after the Minister of Education announced the accreditation policy and withdrew compulsory departmental examinations, M. T. Sillito, the then Coordinator of Professional Development for the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA), inquired of all school boards regarding their policy on accreditation and student evaluation.[9]

> ...64 of the 100 school boards reported as follows: 50 forwarded their policy statements. Seven reported that a policy statement was pending and seven stated that they had no policy.

In April 1974, the ATA data was made available to T. Rusnack who in cooperation with R. LaFleur of the ATA staff compiled and summarized the information in a joint report entitled "Accreditation in Alberta; Summary of Reports from School Boards".[10] In summary the report stated that:

> "At present (June 1974), most school jurisdictions in Alberta are following an approach which is a modification of the Lethbridge proposal. Few school jurisdictions have established unique policy guidelines for their local area. It appears that existing policy guidelines on accreditation

> are temporary measures, as School Superintendents are waiting to see what the Department of Education does in regard to provincial accreditation standards, policies and procedures in the future".

The Department of Education directives of February 7, 1973,[11] contained two papers entitled "Accreditation of Senior High Schools" and "Procedures for the Accreditation of Senior High School". Sent with the two papers was a copy of the Lethbridge policy guidelines on accreditation.

In the early stages of this survey, the Alberta School Trustees Association (ASTA) was requested to provide information with respect to its recent study of existing school system policies on student evaluation. The reply, dated January 27, 1977 was as follows:[12]

> ....Confirms the almost standard use of the Lethbridge policy....I have worked on policy projects ranging from the County of Warner and Calgary Division in the South through to Northlands. Not all jurisdictions have had a policy, but most have. Some have variations from the Lethbridge policy, but it is valid to say that the policy is standard throughout the province.... I have not noticed any indications that the policy is, or will be up for revisions.

As a follow-up in early February, 1977, the study director conducted a telephone survey of 24 school systems selected at random. The questions posed were as follows: Does your system currently have a written policy with respect to evaluation of student achievement in grade 12 subjects? and if so, what are your policy guidelines? The responses can be grouped into three categories:

(a) 63 percent of the systems in the sample had adopted and/or adapted the Lethbridge policy in written form; (b) 21 percent of the systems contacted had explicit or implicit policy based on the Department of Education rules for accreditation with some variation in the role of the superintendent with respect to procedures in endorsing the principal's endorsement of teachers marks; (c) 16 percent of the systems contacted did not offer instruction at the grade 12 level.

The final stage of the survey involved contacting all superintendents in the province by letter. These letters provided an explanation of the survey's aim and asked for copies of:

(a) School board student evaluation policy statements and regulations; (b) High school policy manuals; (c) Individual high school rules and regulations on grade 12 student achievement evaluation.

A second letter was then sent to the superintendents to further explore; (a) the extent of differentiation between policy and practice, and (b) the concerns of the system's administration with respect to problems associated with policy implementation monitoring within their school systems.

As indicated in Table I, a total of 77 of the 102 Alberta school systems offering grade 12, representing an estimated 90 percent of the Alberta grade 12 student population responded to the survey. Several hundred documents were received and reviewed which included individual high school rules and regulations, system policy manuals, copies of school system resolutions, superintendent directives, and principal directives to staff. This material has been classified and is on file with the Department of Education along with the TECHNICAL REPORT of the GRADE 12

TABLE I

Present status of evaluation policies of Alberta school systems offering grade 12 instruction.

Types of System	Divisions	Counties	Public School District	*Sep. School District
Types of Evaluation Policies	1 = 30 2 = 28 3 = 22 4 = 3520 5 = 14% 6 = 79	1 = 30 2 = 29 3 = 21 4 = 4870 5 = 19% 6 = 72	1 = 29 2 = 23 3 = 16 4 = 1370 5 = 47% 6 = 70	1 = 25 2 = 22 3 = 18 4 = 4505 5 = 17% 6 = 82
Explicit Policy (65)	N = 15 (68)	N = 13 (62)	N = 12 (75)	N = 10 (56)
Implicit Policy (24)	N = 5 (23)	N = 4 (19)	N = 3 (19)	N = 6 (34)
No Policy (11)	N = 2 (9)	N = 4 (19)	N = 1 (6)	N = 2 (10)
No (a) Response (24)	N = 6 (21)	N = 8 (28)	N = 7 (30)	N = 4 (18)
Not Offering Gr. 12 Instruction N = 43	N = 2 (6)	N = 1 (3)	N = 6 (21)	N = 34 (81)

* Includes Regionals and Consolidates
(a) From systems offering grade 12 instruction
( ) percentage

1 = operating systems as of December 31, 1976
2 = operating systems offering grade 12 instruction as of December, 1976
3 = reporting systems offering grade 12 instruction
4 = number of grade 12 students receiving instruction in reporting systems
5 = percentage of total Alberta grade 12 population
6 = percentage of systems reporting.

EXAMINATIONS STUDY.

Policies and Practices

Generally, existing policies emphasize student evaluation as a prerogative of school boards who in turn appear to pass on the responsibility to the individual schools, though the superintendent is still assigned the ultimate responsibility.

The "central theme" of existing evaluation policies addresses the need for "fairness and justice". The concept is operationalized through objectivity, justice, and equitableness and these terms are defined in most policy statements as follows:

> (a) Objectivity - free from prejudice, impartiality and unbiased judgement,
>
> (b) Equitableness - equal treatment of all concerned,
> (c) 'Justice - implies an exact following of a standard of what is right and proper.

Most policies go into some detail to explain student and teacher expectation, and all address the need for the system to maintain credibility and thus enhance public confidence in the local schools.

Current Status of School System Policies

It is important to note that policy development is a continuing process. Therefore, as time passes some change in school boards' positions on student evaluation is to be expected. Indeed, it is likely that some change has already occurred since data collection concluded in May, 1977.

The study considered not only policy statements embodied in documents (the explicit policies) but also those that exist in the minds of personnel rather than being embodied in documents (the implicit policies). Since these policy statements afford latitude for action, based upon specific situations and local school circumstances, the actions taken in different settings, even though directed to the same end, quite likely would differ widely amongst school systems, and between schools within each system. An attempt was made to trace the relationships between the school system policy on the one hand and individual school rules on the other with the intent being to identify perceived or real problems that existed between the intent of the school system policy and actual operation at the school level.

The majority of school systems reporting dealt with the evaluation of grade 12 student achievement under an "umbrella" accreditation policy, patterned along the Lethbridge proposal,[13] using both explicitly and implicitly stated wording applicable to all students, in all subjects at the senior high school level. A minority of school systems (20%) extended their accreditation policy guidelines to elementary and junior high schools.

Taking all reporting systems as a group, there exist certain common intentions for the

implementation of the accreditation policy as it applies to evaluating grade 12 students' marks. The particular rules may differ substantially from one system to the other. However, the intended objectives appear to be held fairly generally across the province. The following statements attempt to identify the intentions which seem to underlie the policy statements and regulations developed at the school system level to implement the "Fair and Just" concept.

A student, in the normal course of events, expects:

(a) A clear statement which includes an outline of the content of the course and a resume of the course objectives;
(b) A description of standards to be attained and a resume of the evaluation procedures which includes the value of final examinations, value of classroom participation, value of written assignments, value of term examinations and value of all other factors;
(c) An opportunity to appeal the evaluation he has received. Copies of each pupil's written examination papers complete with key will be kept on file under lock and key for three months after each paper has been written. Each pupil who wishes to write a supplemental examination will, if he so desires, be given the opportunity to examine the paper in the subject he plans to rewrite.
(d) The same treatment (evaluation process) as all other students in a given class;
(e) Roughly similar treatment (evaluation) in one section of a subject to that given students in other sections of the same subject in the same school. It should not be purely or largely an accident of timetable how a student is evaluated;
(f) Some measure of similarity in course expectations (objectives) from school to school. Since a course...originates in the same course documents, the Program of Studies and Curriculum Guides, there should be considerable amount of uniformity in the objectives.

From the school operation manuals sent to the study director, statements relevant to promotion and evaluation at the school level were extracted to indicate the actual procedures used in implementing the school system "Fair and Just" concept. These are meant to represent the most common situations, and not to show the full range of differences in operations procedures in the schools.

(a) Teachers will assign final marks in all subjects at all grade levels.
(b) Evaluation will be an open process and, generally, students should be informed of all the basis of evaluation at the beginning of the term.
(c) Final standing will be the result of weighted averages of marks received through the duration of the course.
(d) Evaluation will be generally an ongoing process throughout the year or semester.
(e) Examinations and tests serve an important function in the educational process and are given frequently by teachers. Students who miss any examinations will be given a zero mark unless they present to the subject teacher either a medical certificate or a note of illness from a parent.
(f) **English 30 Traditional [5 credits] Grade 12.** this course follows the outline as suggested by the Department of Education which stresses ability in the areas of prose fiction, poetry, drama, and the essay. A final testing program should also take place. Tests, written composit - ions, oral presentations and student projects will form the basis of evaluation. (A minimum of 6 for each reporting period is normal). Individual students and student groups may be asked to take part in evaluation but the teacher evaluation will have the heaviest weighting. Attendance should count for not less than 10 percent of the course. A final mark will be the average of 2 report marks for semestered students. Credits will be granted with 40 percent or higher, but 50 percent for university entrance.

(g) **Appeal procedures.** A final mark may be appealed by a student by first requesting a review of the circumstances by the teacher. If necessary, the appeal may be to the Department Head of English, then to the principal.
(h) **Teacher responsibility for all English courses.** It is the teacher's responsibility at the beginning of each unit to inform the student of course and unit objectives, to inform the student of evaluation procedures, to evaluate according to the procedure, and to inform the student of exceptional case and appeal procedure.

In capsule form, the schools' practices, extracted from available handbooks detailing procedures in operationalizing the systems' "Fair and Just" concept, can be stated as follows:

(a) Attendance records are taken into account in evaluation; (b) Statements regarding promotion practices are generally lacking; (c) A student may appeal a mark, first to the teacher and subsequently to the principal; (d) Statements regarding provision for appeals through depart - mental examinations are totally lacking; (e) Evaluation is an ongoing activity throughout the school year. Many examinations and quizzes are given; (f) Teachers are responsible for informing students of course objectives; evaluation and appeal procedures; (g) Teachers are responsible for evaluation according to the approved evaluative procedures.

Policy vs Practice Conclusions

An analysis of statements made by superintendents in response to the question posed with respect to the extent of differentiation between policy at the system level and practice at the local school level provides a basis for concluding that there exists an urgent need to

examine ways of improving the design of the school systems' monitoring mechanisms. Superintendents believe that the apparent lack of consistency in application of policy in actual operations in schools within the same system specifically, and throughout the province generally is a major obstacle in maintaining credibility with the public. They, as a group question the accuracy with which their principals and teachers from year to year, perceive the policy statement and its intended results. The options left open to schools have allowed for the development of a variety of "inventions" of means as years go by, thus making it difficult if not impossible for the superintendent to keep the public informed on what is happening in their schools and how well it is happening.

In other words, the latitude afforded for action, based upon specific situations and local community circumstance which is in theory likely the most effective approach to utilize, causes many problems for the superintendent. The superintendent, who perceives himself as the ultimate authority on promotion, is in the "nightmarish" situation of having to assure his board that the evaluation is a carefully planned and defensible operation, yet he cannot be fully aware of all the "inventions" being used by the professional staff to accompiish the end. Some of the concerns and problem areas perceived by the superintendents, were the following:

(a) The increase of students' averages and subject grade averages at all levels of the senior high school; (b) The marked difference in evaluative criteria between schools operating under the same policies in the same system; (c) The evidence that students are not kept aware of their standing, in spite of the operational procedures developed at the system level to

assure that this is done; (d) The lack of standardization of methods of student evaluation throughout the province; (e) The lack of confidence by the public in the educational system, particularly with the instruction in the basic skills (reading, writing and arithmetic); (f) The apparent inability of schools today (1977) to challenge students with respect to competency, accuracy, discipline, quality and responsibility; (g) The apparent lack of progress toward the development of new courses, and modification of programs to meet the needs of the students and to suit local conditions.

Summary

School systems have generally adopted the Lethbridge policy or some version of it which incorporated the "Fair and Just" concepts. However, the question as to how this policy is being applied at the school level in different jurisdictions may be a crucial one. Regulations devised to implement the "Lethbridge policy" vary from school system to school system. In some cases individual subject teachers work out their own course outlines and evaluation procedures while in other cases it is done by all the subject teachers within the school, or in other cases by all the teachers of a subject within the school system. Conversely, in some school systems, course outlines and evaluation procedures are very detailed and prescriptive. In other cases school systems establish subject committees to develop common course outlines, evaluation procedures and weighting factors for grading to be used by all teachers within the same subject throughout the system.

It is interesting to note the changes that have been effected in the "blueprint" policy by its

"architects". Recently the Lethbridge School District No. 51 has implemented an objective based educational program in English 30 and Mathematics 30. All teachers in both high schools are expected to teach their students mastery of this core before a C letter grade (50-64%) is awarded. If a student does not master the core, the teacher **must** give a mark of D or F (0-49%). The program was described by the system's Director of Curriculum as follows:[14]

> Each school still prepares its own examinations in English 30 and Mathematics 30 but uses a common exam blueprint for the core part of the exam. The exam consists of 50 percent core and 50 percent option (but still from provincial curriculum). All teachers in a school must use the same exam, or an equivalent form, by internal agreement. The intent is to provide common content and standards (C, and D) in these subjects, regardless of teacher and/or school. Teachers are still free to choose content and evaluate students at the upper letter grade levels (B and A).
>
> In the first year a number of procedural problems have arisen but we are slowly working our way through them. We call it "creative problem solving". It is too early to say whether the promise, **on paper**, of this method can be realized fully. We will know better at the end of semester.

FOOTNOTES TO SECTION II

1. Alberta Department of Education, "Compulsory Grade 12 Exams on Way Out" (A press release by the Minister of Education, February 3, 1973. Edmonton, Alberta).

2. Ibid.

3. Alberta Department of Education, "Procedures for the Accreditation of Senior High Schools in Alberta", a paper sent out to school boards and superintendents in the Province of Alberta from the Alberta Deputy Minister of Education, February 7, 1973.

4. Ibid, page 4.

5. Statutes of Canada. **British North America Act**, 1867 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1973).

6. T. Rusnack, "A Report on Evaluating Education in Alberta's Schools". Alberta Department of Education. September, 1975.

7. T. A. Rusnack, "An Overview of the History of Accreditation in the United States and Canada". Alberta Department of Education. September, 1974.

8. ———————, op. cit., September, 1975, page 14.

9. Alberta Teachers Association, "School Board Policies on Accreditation and Student Evaluation" A survey by M. T. Sillito. December, 1973.

10. R. LaFleur and T. Rusnack, "Summary of 'Information from Schoolboards on In-Province Accreditation and Evaluation Policies at the Senior High Level". Summer, 1974.

11. Alberta Department of Education, op. cit., February 7, 1973.

12. Letter from J. Anderson, Alberta School Trustees Association. Edmonton, Alberta. February, 1977.

13. Lethbridge School Systems. "Local Autonomy - Evaluation in Departmental Subjects". Resolu - tion of Lethbridge Public and Separate School Districts adopted October 24, 1972.

14. Lethbridge School District No. 51, "Objective Based Education Program". 1975.

SECTION III

TRENDS IN MARK ALLOCATION

Introduction

There is one point of agreement which emerges from an analysis of the current and previous distribution of marks. That is, since compulsory external examinations were dropped in 1973, there has been a tendency for grade 12 subject marks to creep upwards.

This information has been interpreted from several points of view. From one point of view, it can be said that this is simply a "grade inflation" trend which anti-inflation measures could arrest. From another point of view, one could speculate that the marks awarded now are a better measure of amount learned by grade 12 students, than the assessment derived when a "one shot" examination was administered to determine achievement. From still another point of view, one could hypothesize that the improved mental ability of the student population, combined with the application of better teaching techniques by a better qualified teaching force has resulted in more learning taking place; hence higher marks.

This study endorses the view that in any discussion about quality of product in education, the greatest variety of factors come into play. It is self evident that these factors have interlocking types of relationships rendering isolation of a single element impossible. Some include the factors alluded to above. Others would include degree of development and change in lifeskills, types of lifestyles, societal attitudes to education

and economic and social conditions. Although this section of the report examines trends in marks using the change in the external examination system as the reference point, it does not wish to convey the impression that this one change is considered to have had the most to do with what has happened to marks. Other changes which occurred concurrently may have had a greater influence, however, none of these was as clear cut in terms of when it happened and of what happened.

LOCAL SYSTEM TRENDS

To secure as many returns of mark data as possible, the Study Steering Committee recommended that all school systems offering instruction at the grade 12 level be requested to submit local studies of the "hard" data on their students. The letter addressed to the superintendent, advised that all information would be kept in strict confidence, and would be used only to report local trends and to supplement the data available from Alberta Education. Of the 90 superintendents contacted, all but five responded. Structured analyses of marks attained by their students before and after the 1973 accreditation decision, along with copies of directives and various statistical reports submitted for review by their respective boards, were received from 37 school systems. These included all urban systems with school populations over 10,000 and a majority of divisional and county school systems. Several master's theses which examined the impact of accreditation on a specific school system were received. Forty-two superintendents, representing about 60 school systems reported that spot checks and monitoring by random sampling had been done on and off since 1973, but that no data in the

form requested were available. However summary descriptions of studies done in a specific school to test out an hypothesis or to respond to a question posed by a trustee at a board meeting were provided. A typical example of the type of information received from this group of superintendents is best illustrated by quoting parts of the following letter:

> -------one recent study of grade 12 results that may be of interest to you. It was undertaken to establish whether or not the abolition of departmental examinations had resulted in higher gradings for students in ————————————————————————. Only in Social Studies 30 was there a significant rise over 1968-69, but, in comparison with the results of June, 1973, when the students were credited with the better of the school mark and the departmental mark, there has been no inflation of Social Studies marks.

It would appear then, that a majority of school systems, in a general way, annually review and monitor the operation of their student evaluation policies. However larger systems (5,000 or more students) within this group have in most instances employed personnel to develop and implement instructional improvement programs with major responsibilities directly associated with the evaluation component of instruction. Taking all reporting systems as a group, the common intent of this program can be stated as follows:

> To assist teachers to develop acceptable procedures for the evaluation of student progress to meet the requirements of the Department of Education with respect to accreditation of schools and to assist administrators and teachers in designing evaluation practices which incorporate the principle of fairness and justness. [1]

Some examples of comments and statistics received which are meant to illustrate themes and problems associated with evaluation at the local level are highlighted below.

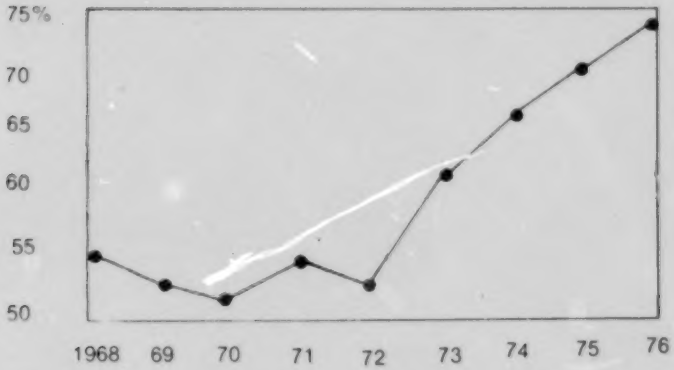
Selection of comments and local data report summaries.

Small high school of fewer than 20 grade 12 students.

----I wish to inform you that the trend in results for subjects in which provincial exams were given previously is definitely upwards.

Average for six former departmentals.

TABLE II



Note: The high averages in 1976 in the opinion of the teachers were due to an exceptional class.

Rural high school-120 grade 12 students.

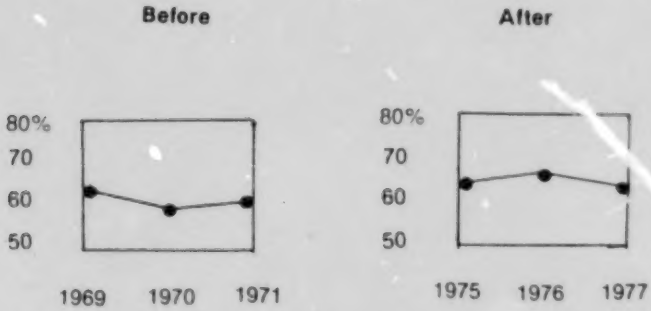
Attached you will find a breakdown of the academic grade 12 course marks offered at ---------- for three years prior to the abolishment of the

departmentals and for three years since the school was responsible for setting the exams. I would remind you that ———————————— ———————— is the major high school in our area with a student population in excess of 500.

A quick review of the marks would seem to indicate that the general public's view and particularly the views of the university that the grade 12 marks have risen substantially are not borne out by the evidence.

TABLE III

Results (average) for seven grade 12 examinations



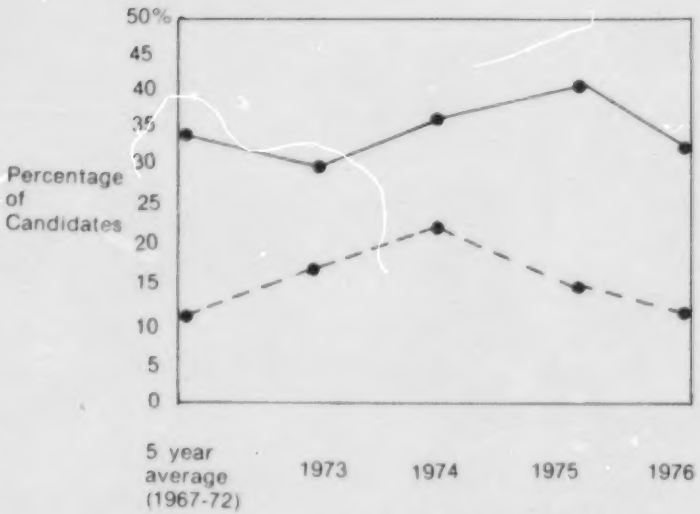
Large county school system with over 800 grade 12 students.

The ———————————————— has monitored grade 12 results prior to and after accreditaion. A five year average of pupils marks was maintained as a benchmark when departmental examinations were administered. The attached graph shows the distribution of all grade 12 matriculation marks beginning with the benchmark 1967-72. You will note that following a period of higher marks, the trend has been to return to the five year average. Our concern has been that this trend **does not** appear to be evident across the province.

TABLE IV

Chart depicting average percentage distribution of "A" & "B" marks for all matriculation subjects.

A = 80 - 100%, B = 65 - 79%.

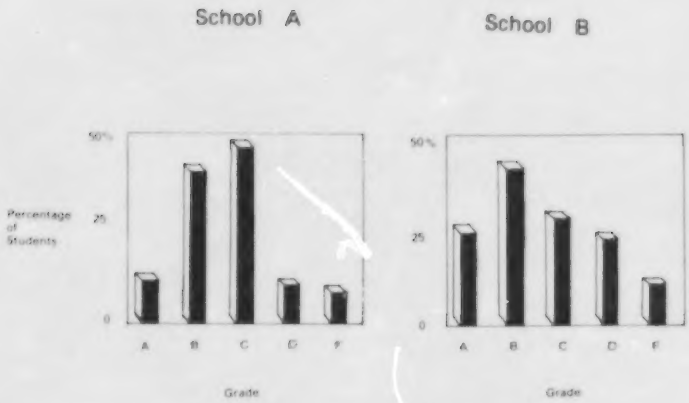


Small school division with several high schools.

An incomplete analysis to date seems to illustrate a concern in some final tests coupled with the assignment of too many high marks. For example, one of our high schools reported a failure rate of 2 percent while the other high school in our system failed 4 percent of the candidates.

TABLE V

Distribution of marks



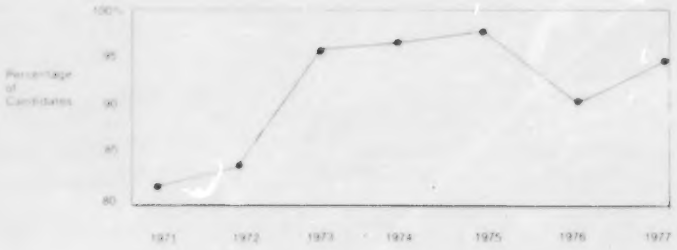
Regional high school of 200 grade 12 students

----The real concern is with the tendency for schools to grant C (50 percent) standing to students who earn marks in the 41 percent to 47 percent range.

This school reports an escalation in the "C" or better marks from a low of 83 percent of candidates to a high of 98 percent and attributes this variation to the "lets give him a'c' " attitude of principal and staff.

TABLE VI

Percentage of Candidates earning marks of C or better in the years 1971 to 1977.



Medium sized county system with six small high schools.

---As seen by our figures there has been a gradual decline since 1974 in the percentage of students attaining an academic pass, i.e., 50 percent or better. In 1972-73, 91 percent of students writing examinations received 50 percent or better. In 1974-75, the percentage was down to 87 percent as seen in Table VII.

TABLE VII

Percentage of academic passes at the 'C' or better level.

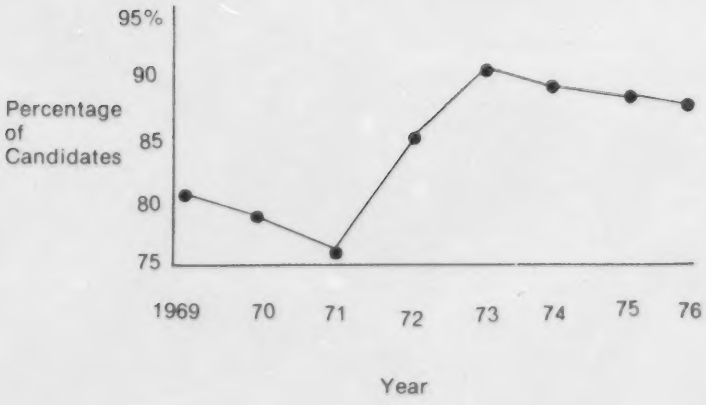
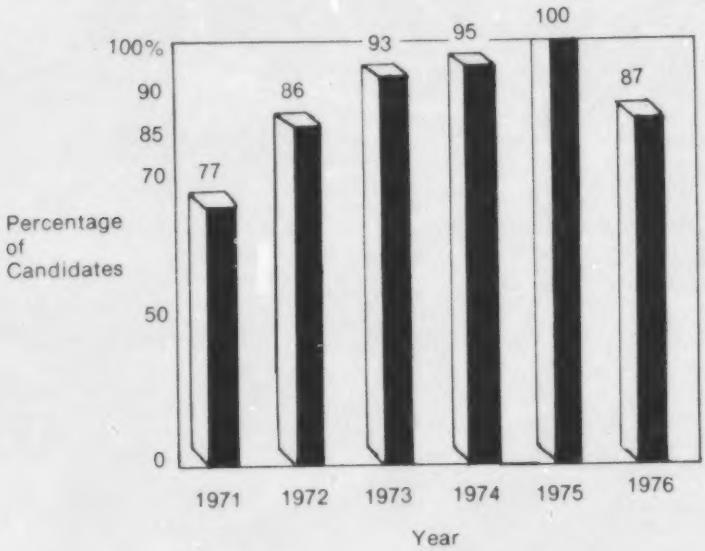


TABLE VIII

Urban system with about 500 grade 12 students.

Comparative data on grade 12 examinations scores of "C" or better (50% or more).



Small urban system with 170 grade 12 students.

----following are our findings comparing high school marks obtained before and after accreditation.

- In a single high school, as is our case, it is very difficult fo attribute any notable grading changes to and single factor. These findings reflect the reason why marks have changed in our high school over the past years.
- The quality of education in the total district has improved over the past decade and thus it shows in the grade XII results. This improved quality is a result of board planning, needs programs and hiring practices which have improved the conditions of learning in schools and classrooms.
- The rating of students by the teachers is still consistent with the departmental expectations.

This judgement can be made by studying the marks obtained by students in their appeals. The average of the departmental appeal marks is as high, if not higher than, the school marks.

- Some variation in results could be noted from one year to another in a single school because a particular group of students can have a more positive or less positive attitude which permeates an entire grade, but not necessarily the total student body.

An observable result of the school marking system rather than the departmental finals approach has been the decline in the number of failures. In our grades (9-12) high school, there are two contributing factors to explain the decrease. The first is that a final mark is determined by many measures including daily assignments, class participation, research projects, progressive testing, etc. Because of such a broad base it is difficult for a student not to be able to experience enough success to pass. Secondly, teacher exams will test those areas of the course which the teacher emphasized and not necessarily only those which the departmental examination attempts to measure.

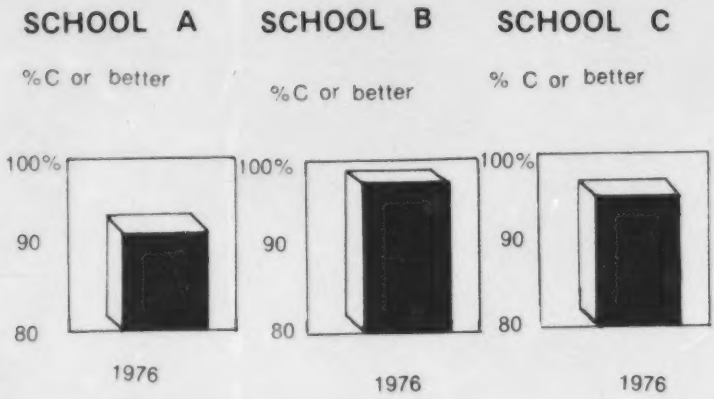
It is our belief that school accreditation marks reflect student performance with at least the same accuracy as measurement by departmental examinations.

Large urban system with 5,000 plus grade 12 students.

-----The average proportion of A's and B's awarded to students in the various courses has increased with a corresponding decrease in the number of students receiving C's, D's and F's. Generally, the distribution of marks is greater in the languages and Social Studies than in other subjects. The A's and B's for the languages have increased by eight percent to eighteen percent whereas 'mathematics and Science subjects have increased from one percent to six percent.

The apparent variation in evaluative criteria used by schools within our system is the subject of a great deal of "talk" amongst ——————— ——————— high school students and parents. This difference is quite defensible in educational terms. However, politically it's dynamite-----.

TABLE IX



A school system accredited since 1968.

-----I have tried to represent this information in ways which will convey most clearly what I perceive to be happening to grades (standards) in matriculation subjects in ——————————————————.

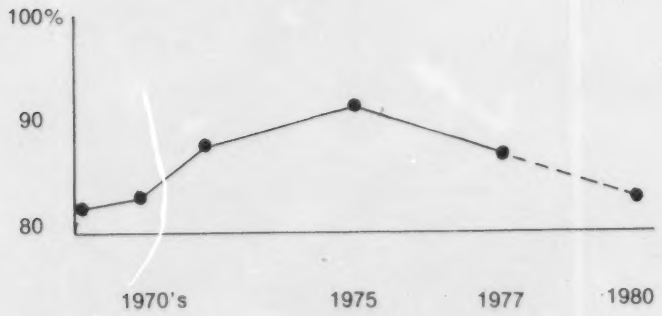
- English and Social Studies A and B percentages have been rising steadily since 1972-73. There is no known explanation for this phenomenon.
- In English and Social Studies our student achievement was reasonably consistent from 1967-68 through 1972-73, i.e., over the preceeding, during, and just after the departmentals were abandoned.
- Scores in Mathematics 30, Chemistry 30 - 30X and Biology 30 have fluctuated over the years. On the whole, they tend to be higher, on the average, from 1972-73 on, than they were before that year.
- There has been an obvious increase in percentages of A's and B's awarded in both Mathematics 30 and Biology 30, but not in Chemistry 30, since the departmentals went.
- Most of the increase in high grades has been at the expense of C's and not necessarily due to fewer D's and F's.

SUMMARY

Taking all reporting systems as a group, the data support the following generalizations. First, the typical line of mark trend over the past five years for local systems was a sharp increase in the first two years after general accreditation, followed by a steady increase in all test subject areas up to 1975. A slight drop was evident in 1976 and 1977. A continuation of this trend to 1980 would likely result in a return to the five year average established under the former system of compulsory examinations, as seen in the following table.

TABLE X

General trend line of marks awarded (50% or better) in all former grade 12 examinations.



Second, the data clearly indicate that there exists a marked difference in evaluative criteria between schools in the same system as well as amongst systems throughout the province.

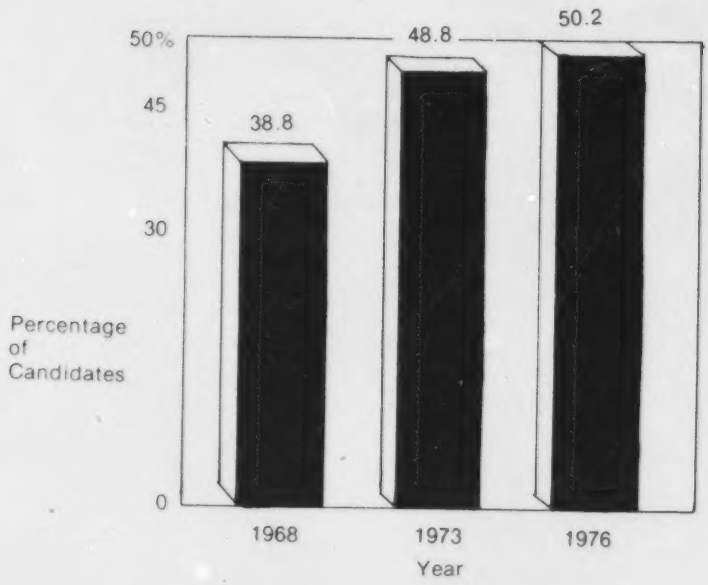
PROVINCIAL TRENDS

What has happened in terms of grade 12 academic achievement province wide since accreditation is of considerable interest and has been the subject of analysis by Alberta Education.[2] This report undertook to determine the following:

1. Changes in mark allocation prior to and since accreditation in grades 10 and 11.

TABLE XI

Summary chart reflecting the increase in percentage of candidates awarded "B" or better (65% or better) in six matriculation subjects.



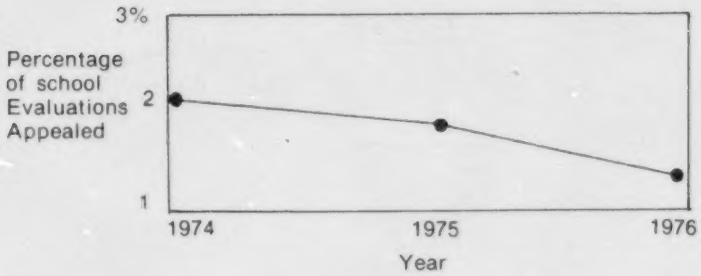
English 10-20, Social Studies 10-20, Mathematics 10-20, Biology 10-20, Chemistry 10-20, Physics 10-20.

2. Changes in number of students writing appeal examinations in March and August.

In each of the years 1974 to 1976, approximately 90,000 subject marks awarded by the schools could have been appealed by students writing a departmental examination in March and August. During 1974 and 1975 Reid [3] reports that about two percent of the school evaluations were appealed. However, as seen in the following table, the rate of appeal dropped 35 percent in 1976.

TABLE XII

Summary chart reflecting decrease in number of students appealing school mark.

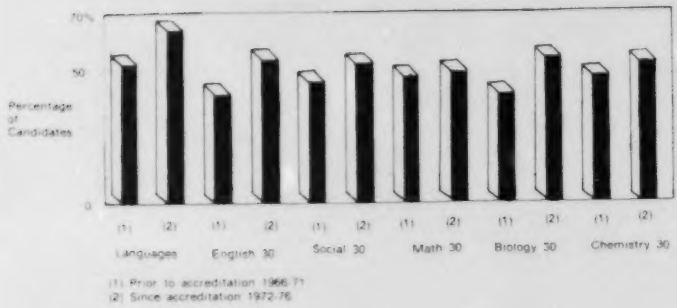


3. Comparison of achievement score in the previous departmental examinations since accreditation.

As indicated in the following table, since accreditation in 1973 there has been a general increase in the A and B grades in all subjects with the exception of those awarded in Chemistry 30X and Physics 30X. The 1966-69 B or better percentage for Physics 30X was 54.8 as compared to 54.7 in 1972-76. The Chemistry 30X figures indicate an increase of less than one percent in the post accreditation period.

TABLE XIII

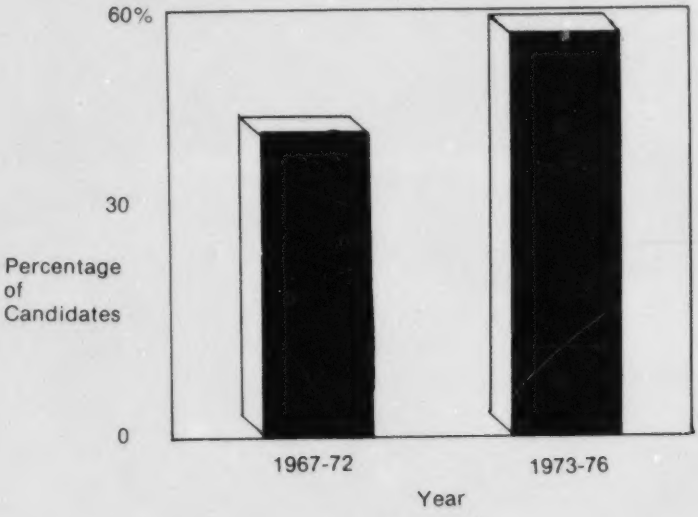
Chart reflecting increase in number of students awarded 'B' or better marks in various subjects.



The following table compares the percentages of candidates awarded 65 percent or more 'B' and 'A') in former departmental exams during the "benchmark" year and since accreditation.

TABLE XIV

Chart reflecting the increase in percentages of candidates awarded 65 percent or more (B and A) in former departmental exams during time period of benchmark (1967-72) and (1973-76).



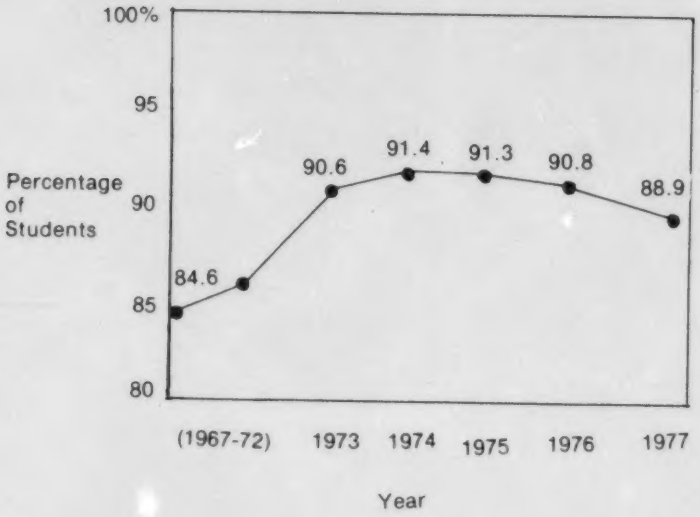
In 12 former departmental examinations, English 30, Social Studies 30, Mathematics 30, Mathematics 31, Biology 30, Chemistry 30, Chemistry 30x, Physics 30, Physics 30X, French 30, German 30, Ukrainian 30.

4. Comparison of achievement scores prior to and since accreditation.

The increase in the average proportion of 'B' or better marks to students in various courses has resulted in a corresponding decrease in the number of students receiving C's, D's and F's. The following four tables graphically illustrate this point.

TABLE XV

Chart showing percentages of candidates awarded 50 percent or more (C or better) in former departmental exams during the time periods of benchmark (1967-72) and 1973 to 1977.



In 12 former departmental examinations, English 30, Social Studies 30, Mathematics 30, Mathematics 31, Biology 30, Chemistry 30, Chemistry 30X, Physics 30, Physics 30X, French 30, German 30, Ukrainian 30.

TABLE XVI

Chart showing percentages of candidates awarded 50 percent or more (C or better) in English 30 during the time periods of benchmark (1967-72) and 1973 to 1977.

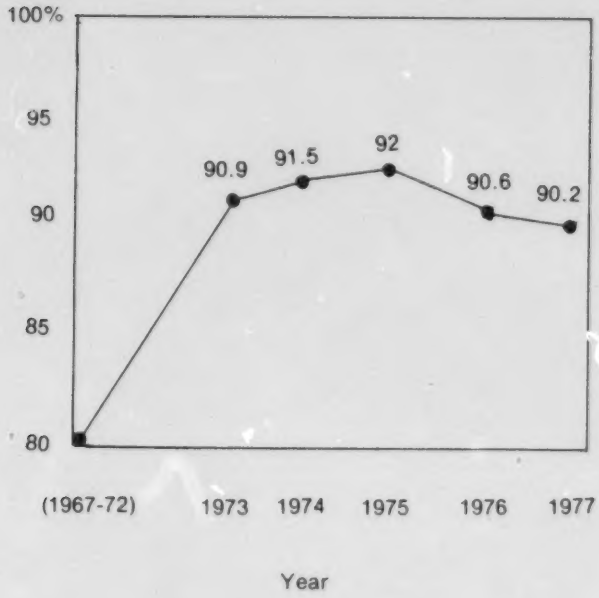
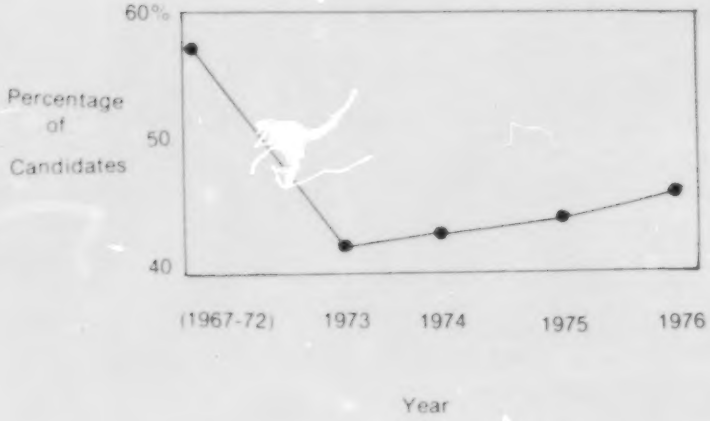


TABLE XVII

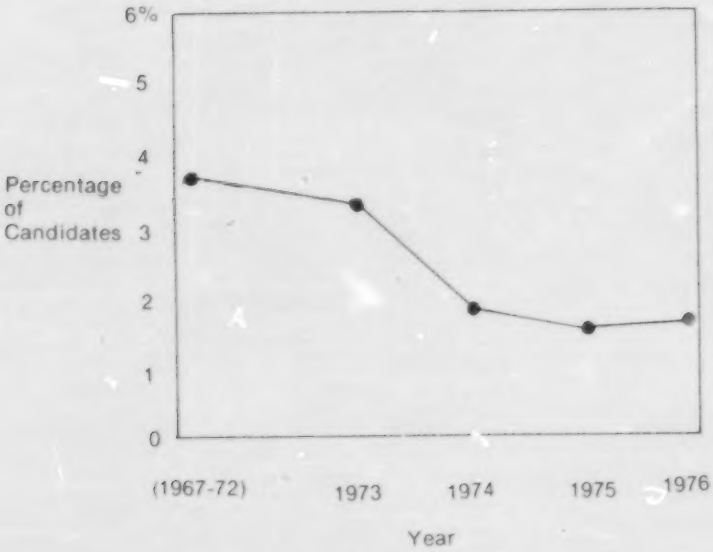
Chart showing percentage of candidates awarded C standing (50%-64%) or less in former departmental exams during the time periods of benchmark (1967-72) and 1973 to 1976.



In 12 former departmental examinations, English 30, Social Studies 30, Mathematics 30, Mathematics 31, Biology 30, Chemistry 30, Chemistry 30X, Physics 30, Physics 30X, French 30, German 30, Ukrainian 30.

TABLE XVIII

Chart showing percentage of candidates not receiving credit standing in former departmentals during the time periods of benchmark (1967-72) and 1973 to 1976.

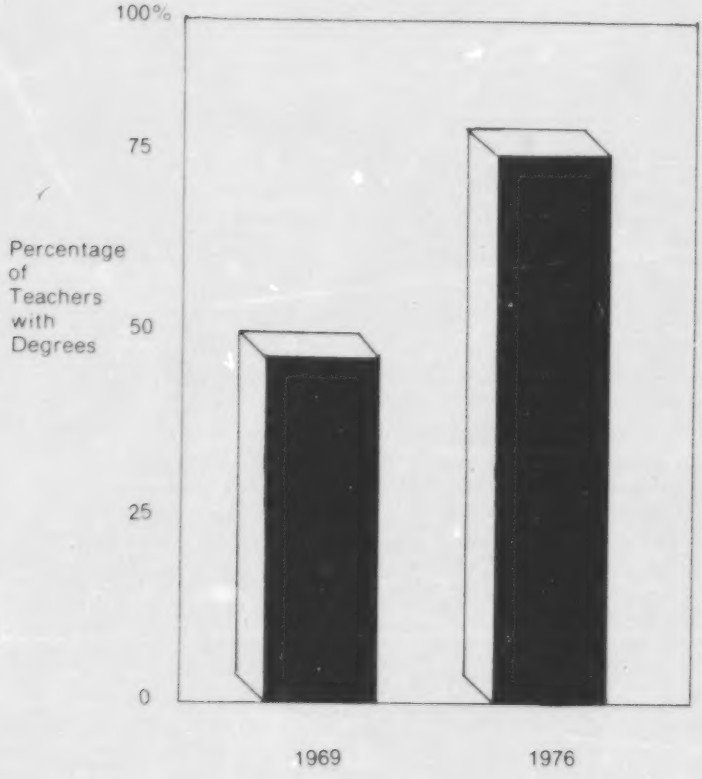


5. Comparison of professional training of teaching staff for the period prior to and since accreditation.

One of a number of variables to be considered when analyzing grade 12 achievement is the professional training of the teacher. Reid [4] reports that the number of teachers with university degrees has increased substantially since 1969. The following table illustrates the change which has occurred.

TABLE XIX

Chart reflecting the increase in percentage of teaching staff with a university degree since 1969.



SUMMARY

This section reviewed mark trends reported by local systems and by the Student Evaluation and Data Processing Services of Alberta Education.

The Reid Study[5] which related to the province at large reported that since accreditation in 1973 there has been a general increase in marks awarded by school staffs in all subjects in all grades with the exception of those awarded in Chemistry 30X and Physics 30X. At the grade 10 and 11 levels the distribution during the period 1967-68 to 1975-76 shows there was an increase in the percentages in both the "A" and "B" grades awarded with a corresponding decrease in the "C", "D" and failure categories.

The school system data analysis established that the changes observed by Reid[6] were general throughout all local reporting areas.

FOOTNOTES TO SECTION III

1. County of Lacombe No. 14, **Major Areas of Responsibility of Supervisor of Instruction.** Policy, September 1, 1974.

2. Reid, J.E., "A Comparison of Grade 12 Academic Achievement 1966-67 to 1968-69, and 1972-73 to 1975-76", Alberta Education, May, 1977.

3. Ibid., page 10

4. Ibid., page 13

5. Ibid.,

6. Ibid.,

PART II AN AUDIT OF

SECTION I

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this component of the study was to gather and analyze the publics' opinions regarding what has happened since compulsory provincial examinations were dropped, and what ought to happen regarding evaluation of student achievement particularly at the grade 12 level. The Study Steering Committee decided from the outset that a province wide, representative sample of all the different publics would be invited to give their opinions. Thus, what and who would be asked, broadly determined the general nature of the data to be collected, and to some extent the method of collection. The costliness of the interview method of gathering opinions prohibited its use as the primary data gathering instrument. It should also be noted that strong feelings, attitudes and emotions are involved in the question of provincial government involvement in evaluation of grade 12 students. In such issues private interviews as a method of collecting data are subject to a great deal of bias and call for very well trained interviewers. However, in a later decision the Study Steering Committee decided to make limited use of the interview technique after it was determined that 75 percent of the adult respondents indicated a willingness to be interviewed.

THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

As a primary data collecting tool, the questionnaire was perceived as being very important to the study. Substantial time and effort

on the part of the Study Steering Committee were devoted to its design.

Item statements were developed from a multitude of sources. Major sources included policy statements about examinations and quality of education from both provincial and local district governments and interpretations of purposes, reasons for withdrawal and consequences of termination of mandatory external examinations, as stated by various groups, individuals and Study Steering Committee members. The study director, in consultation with Department of Education and University of Alberta personnel and others examined and revised the item statements. They were then discussed in detail by the Committee. The Committee considered advice from MACOSA and other sources and tried to incorporate same into revisions of the questionnaire. Experiences from tryouts arranged by Committee members with friends and neighbors also provided useful suggestions for revisions. A decision was made by the Committee to control the length of the instrument and to simplify the format in order to enhance return from the public at large. Thus, instead of designing statements which provided precise, hence lengthy definitions of terms and various scenarios, the focus was on presenting the respondent with a whole series of brief but general statements about examinations concerning which the public had formed well crystallized opinions. Even though this approach might have fostered an appearance of bias, the questionnaire was deemed to have both construct and face validity for the purpose of yielding an impressionistic type picture of the perceptions of various publics on this matter.

Sponsorship, and the reason for doing the study were delineated on the front page of the questionnaire. At the end of each section a space

was provided for the respondent to make a statement. The back page contained five questions relating to personal characteristics of the respondent while one question asked whether or not the respondent would be willing to be interviewed, if the need arose. The questionnaires were color coded for teachers and students. Those sent to participants by direct mail were white and number coded for purposes of follow-up and group identification.

The design of this component of the study included the following features which were intended to encourage participation: (a) The questionnaire format and printing style were attractive; (b) The direct mail participants received a postage paid, self-addressed envelope for return of the questionnaire; (c) The teachers and students were reached as a group through the principal of the high schools selected to participate. (A particular group of students within each school was chosen to complete the questionnaires during school hours, but at the time of the day when these students met as a group, so as not to disrupt the regular school routine. Teachers were asked to complete the questionnaires, and return them to the principal for bulk mailing); (d) An explanatory letter requesting approval of the participating sample school was sent to each superintendent. On receipt of an affirmative response the principal of each of the sample schools was contacted. When the principal agreed that the school would participate, the questionnaires for the students and teachers of the school were sent with a covering letter and instructions for distribution and return.

POPULATION SURVEYED AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Introduction

For purposes of this study, all adult Albertans and grade 12 students were deemed to have either a direct or indirect vested interest in the educational delivery system. Those stakehold - ers perceived as having a direct stake would include students, educational system employees and employers and parents. The public at large, employers, other than the aforementioned, and post secondary school personnel (employees and employers) could be said to have an indirect interest in what is happening in Alberta schools, particularly at the grade 12 level. Thus, the sample selected to participate in the survey was composed of individuals province-wide who were viewed as belonging to one of the following ten population sub-groups; (a) school trustees, (b) public at large (householders), (c) school superintendents, (d) high school teachers, (e) grade 12 students, (f) high school principals, (g) education consultants, (h) post secondary school personnel, (i) public sector employers, and (j) private sector employers.

The manner of selecting participants from each of the population sub-groups varied. In some instances the total universe (all individuals) in the sub-group was included in the sample, for some others the individuals were selected by utilizing a random model, while yet for others the selection design used was a mixed model. That is to say the design used a combination of a random and fixed constants models to select individuals out of the groups.

In brief, what the study did, in essence,

was to take all steps necessary to insure that the sample was as far as possible representative of the universe samples (total population of the group). Details of the sampling strategies used are outlined in the TECHNICAL REPORT of the GRADE 12 EXAMINATION STUDY.

School Trustees
N = 144

As of May 1, 1977 there were approximate-950 elected school trustees in Alberta serving on 144 boards and committees of county councils. Because it was hyothesized that the chairperson of each board generally represents the consensus of opinions of the trustees on the board on most matters, the total population of school board chairpersons was included in the trustee sample. Hence, it can be assumed that all school trustees in Alberta, through their chairperson were given an opportunity to voice opinions.

Public at Large
N = 2880

From information provided by Alberta Government Telephones (AGT) and the Edmonton Telephone System it was determined that 97 percent to 98 percent of all Alberta householders had telephone service on March 1, 1977. Updated area directories which listed the names and addresses of the domestic user, based on the April, 1977 rent billings were made available to the study director. A sample consisting of 3,000 names was chosen using a combination random and fixed factor (geographic area) sampling design. For detail on the procedures used in securing the sample, see the TECHNICAL

REPORT on the GRADE 12 EXAMINATION STUDY. Of the 3,000 addressees, 120 are known to have died or left the area during the period from April 1 st. to May 1 st. Envelopes were returned to the study director, marked 'deceased' or address unknown. It was considered that this group was not eligible for selection in the first instance, hence the sample size was reduced to 2,880. As seen in Table XX, the sample is composed of nine sub-samples, one from each of the telephone directory areas of Alberta.

School Superintendents
N = 90

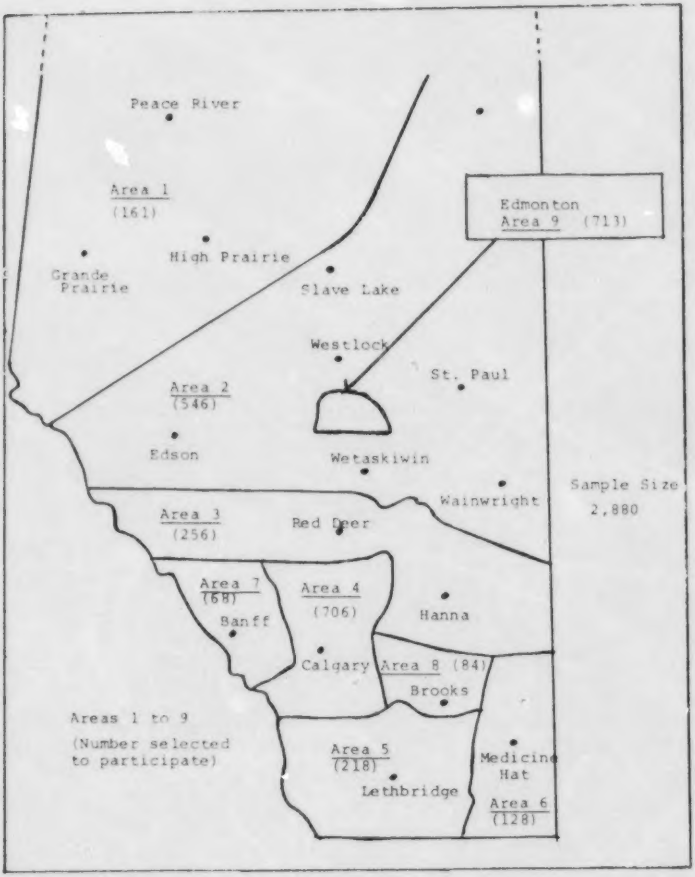
The total population was included in the superintendent sample. Alberta Education provid ed the study director with an up-dated list of locally appointed school superintendents number - ing 90 in all. Two changes in superintendencies took place between the time the list was received on May 1, 1977 and the date of the mailing of the questionnaire. The study director was not advised in time to allow for a correction in mailing lables. Both envelopes were returned marked "address unknown".

Teachers N = 600 **and Students** N = 2191

For the sampling of these two groups, the high school was used as the basic unit. The principal of the selected school acted as the agent of the study to receive the questionnaires, to explain the study to participants and to collect and return the completed material to the study director. The teachers and students samples were selected on the basis of two criteria. The first was that they belonged to the basic unit school. The second was that teachers were teaching or

TABLE XX
PUBLIC AT LARGE SAMPLE

Map showing telephone directory areas and number of survey participates from each area.



counselling one-half time or more at the grade 12 level and students were receiving instruction or had received instruction in English 30 or English 33 during the 1976-77 school year.

A stratified sample of 52 schools was selected on the basis of two criteria. The first was geographic location. The second was school size. A table which classified all of the high schools (290) in the province offering instruction at the grade 12 level by size and geographic location was used to determine how many schools of a given size were required for the sample. The sample schools of each size were then distributed over eight geographic zones.[1] Finally, the actual schools of the size and geographic area required for the sample were chosen randomly from all such schools with the given characteristics. For detail of the procedure used, the reader is referred to the TECHNICAL REPORT on the GRADE 12 EXAMINATION STUDY.

Principals

N = 290

The total population of principals of high schools offering instruction at the grade 12 level was included in the sample.

Education Consultants
N = 120

The total population of Alberta education consultants was deemed to consist of the following categories of employees: (a) Consultants and

1. Edmonton, Calgary and the six Regional Office of Education Zones.

Coordinators assigned to the six regional offices of education, (b) School system central office professional personnel, excluding the superintendent, and (c) Alberta Education central office professional personnel to the associate deputy minister's level. Using department files, a random sample of 50 individuals from categories (b) and (c) above were selected along with the total population of category (a).

Post Secondary School Personnel
N = 85

For sampling post secondary institutions the strategy used was to select respondents from amongst the heads of departments within those institutions. The sample (50 participants) originally generated included the following; (a) presidents of the 14 Regional Colleges and two Institutes of Technology, and (b) faculty deans of the four Universities. The population of the latter group consisted of 15 deans from the University of Alberta, 12 deans from University of Calgary, 6 deans from the University of Lethbridge, and one (the president) from the University of Athabasca. In late July 1977, the Study Steering Committee accepted a recommendation from MACOSA that more individuals employed by Colleges and Technical Institutes be added to the sample. Consequently, an additional 35 department heads from these institutions were sent a questionnaire in August. The 20 questionnaires returned were manually analyzed and the findings incorporated in the frequency and percentage counts.

Employers
N = 400

The sample consisted of 100 employers drawn from the public sector and 300 from the private sector.

Public sector employers

An updated list supplied by Alberta Municipal Affairs contained the names and addresses of the chairmen and mayors of the following types of public sector employer units: 31 county councils, 112 hospital boards, including those operating teaching hospitals, 10 city councils, 105 town councils, 18 municipal district councils, and 166 village councils for a total of 442. The sample of employers was selected on the basis of three criteria. The first was type, with six categories. The second was size, with four categories and the third was geographic location based on previously described telephone directory areas.

Private sector employers

The sample of employers was drawn by Alberta Treasury's Statistical Branch from a subset of the "ES1" list which is maintained for purposes of the employment and payrolls surveys by Labour Division of Statistics Canada. The subset used was the "ES1 respondents' list", the employers on which all had at some time recently been contacted on a Labour Division Survey and had responded. The specifications called for a sample to be drawn from 3,139 employment reporting units which included only units employing twenty or more employees, and only units in the private sector. Crown corporations,

including utilities were considered to be private employers. A systematic sample was drawn in which one set of characters in the address was used to create a random start. Sample ratios were provided by the study director for each size category, and a minimum sample size was provided as well as authority to override the ratio if too few employers were selected. These ratios and minima are shown on Table XXI. On the strength of estimates of the file size made, the sample was expected to contain about 900 employers given the sample ratios. In practice, it contained 304. For complete detail on the procedure used in securing the sample, the reader is referred to the TECHNICAL REPORT on the GRADE 12 EXAMINATION STUDY.

TABLE XXI

Employer sample

Size Code	Range	Ratio (½)	Minimum Number	Number Selected
0	(5000- +)	100	2	0
1	(2500-4999)	30	3	2
2	(1500-2499)	30	5	6
3	(1000-1499)	20	5	5
4	(500-999)	10	5	5
5	(200-499)	10	20	19
6	(100-199)	0	20	42
7	(50-99)	10	20	73
8	(20-49)	10	20	152
9	(19 -)	N/A	N/A	N/A

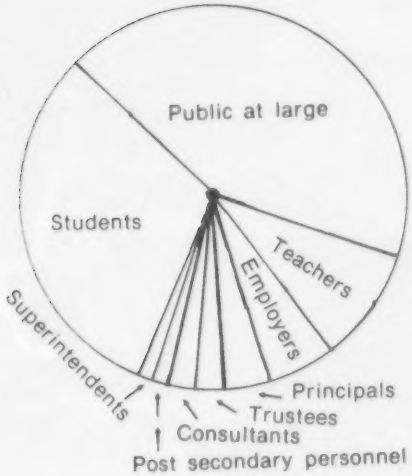
Summary

A total of 6,800 individuals from nine groups were selected to respond to the questionnaire. The following chart reflects the nature of the population of the respondent sample.

TABLE XXII

Percentage distribution of total sample according to groups.

N = 6,800



Public	43%
Students	32
Teachers	9
Employers	6
Principals	4
Trustees	2
Consultants	2
Superintendents	1
Post secondary	1
	100

QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNS

Introduction

The central difficulty in all direct mail survey techniques is that the percentage of returns is small. A questionnaire of some interest

to the recipient may be expected to show only twenty percent return, even when conditions are favorable [1] If non-respondents are contacted a second and a third time, the return may be increased to thirty percent.

Research tells us a considerable amount about who does and does not respond to mailed questionnaires. At one time it was felt by many that it was largely a matter of chance whether a person did or did not respond to a questionnaire sent through the mail. If it arrived at a convenient time the recipient would respond to it; if it did not, no response could be expected. A study by Wallace[2] showed that this is not the case at all. He concluded that there are people who by and large tend to return questionnaires, and there are those who do not. Insofar as these groups differ in relevant respects, the results achieved are likely to be biased. Thus it is accepted that the results of this study's questionnaire from all groups except teachers and students may be considered to be biased by an unknown quality.

General Reaction to the Questionnaire

There were over 4,500 questionnaires returned by the cutoff date of July 15, 1977. About one percent of these were not codeable. An additional 20 questionnaires received from post-secondary school personnel were processed manually after July 15, 1977 for reasons previously mentioned. Approximately 150 quest - ionnaires, the majority of which came from the public at large, were not processed because they arrived too late. A relatively small number of respondents (less than 2%) were critical of the questionnaire. Points made included the following : A number of respondents said that they did not like the questionnaire because in was ''very poorly

constructed''. Several individuals employed in the field of education said the statements were much too ambiguous. Others said that the questionnaire was biased in favor of examinations. About an equal number of others declared that the questionnaire was biased the other way. Since only about 100 of over 4,476 participants criticized the instrument, it may be inferred that for the vast majority, the general reaction to the questionnaire was satisfactory.

Rate of return

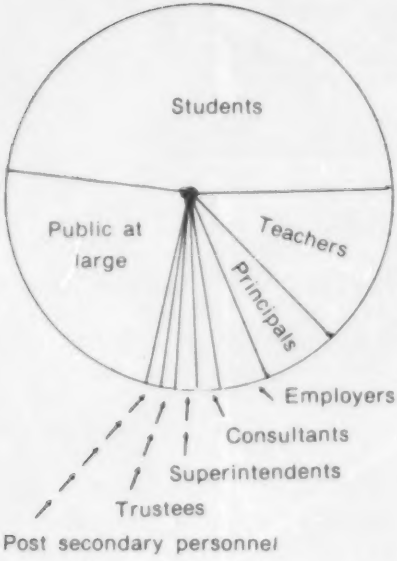
It was expected that the rate of return, from individuals who were clients of, or employed by the educational system, would be fairly high. As shown in Table XXIII, this proved to be the case. Trustees and employer response rate was considered low. In case of the former, the response rate was the third lowest of all groups. There is no known explanation for this phenomenon.

This study considers the rate of return from the public at large as excellent. As previously stated, in direct mail surveys, the expected rate of return rarely ever reaches the 35 percent level even if non-respondents are contacted a second and a third time. Because of time constraints, non-respondents were not followed up. Likely, if this procedure had been implemented several hundred more completed questionnaires would have been received in time for processing.

TABLE XXIII

Chart showing relative size of participating groups.

N = 4476



Students	48%
Public	23
Teachers	13
Principals	6
Employers	4
Consultants	2
Superintendents	2
Trustees	1
Post secondary	1
	100

TABLE XXIV

GROUPS SURVEYED AN RATE OF RETURN

Groups	Questionnaires distributed	Questionnaires returned	Percentage return
Trustees	144	52	36
Public at large	2880	1021	35
School Superintendents	90	77	86
Schools 1	52	52	100
Teachers	600	587	98
Students	2191	2171	99
Principals	290	256	88
Education Consultants	120	89	74
Post Secondary School Personnel	85	50	58
Employers (Public sector)	100	34	34
Employers (Private sector)	300	139	46
TOTAL	6800	4476	65.4

1 Basic Units selected at random from total of 290 schools offering instruction at grade 12 level. Questionnaires to teachers of grade 12 subjects, and students registered in either English 30 or 33 were administered by basic unit schools.

TREATMENT OF DATA

Introduction

The plan for the processing of the data was developed at the time when the questionnaire was designed. That was to use computer analysis to obtain frequency and percentage responses from each population sub-group to each item of the questionnaire. Rather than include a stencil scoring device or separate answer sheet the respondent was directed to circle one of the answer choices printed beside each item statement. In this survey, it was obviously desirable to avoid the use of a separate recording system because of the inconvenience to the respondent. Thus, as a first step in the computer analysis of responses it was necessary that each questionnaire item response, for each respondent, be coded manually. The Fortran coding format was used. Then, the data in integer form were keypunched and recorded on tape.

Analyses programs

Basically, the questionnaire asked for answers to four questions about standards of achievement of grade 12 students: (a) What is happening? (b) What had led up to this situation - that is, what has happened in the past? (c) What is being thought? What is wanted? By whom? (d) What will happen? What should be done?

The answers to these questions were sought by asking the respondent to react to 96 items categorized as follows: (a) What do you think has happened? 68 items, five of which were spaces for respondent statements; (b) What do you think ought to happen? 20 items, two of which were spaces for write-in statements; (c) Personal

characteristics? six items dealing with such matters as educational level, length of stay in Alberta, experience with departmentals, and whether or not the respondent was a parent. It was necessary to add a 97 th field to record the geographic location of the respondent.

A total of 4,476 respondents made 393,360 observations. Omissions in item responses, and blanks in comment spaces account for the difference between recorded observations and the maximum possible (434,172).

In the analyses of these observations the following procedures were used (a) The printable written comments were retrieved from each questionnaire, and classified according to groups and recorded. (The complete text is on file with Alberta Education). Then, the most typical responses were selected for inclusion in the exemplar sections of the study. An additional list of comments classified as responding to the WHAT IS'' and ''WHAT OUGHT TO BE?'' questions of the study was compiled; (b) The remaining questionnaire items were analyzed by computer using several ''Statistical Package for the Social Sciences''(SPSS) programs. Computer print outs were produced which provided the following information: (a) Frequency and percent - age responses to each item by all respondents, by adult respondents only, by the student group and by each other group; (b) Frequency and percentage responses to each item by each group according to geographic regions; by the total number of respondents according to urban-rural locations and by educational levels for trustees and public at large; (c) Cross tabulations to test for significant relationships between questionnaire items.

Further details on coding format and computer analysis procedures used are presented

in the TECHNICAL REPORT on the GRADE 12 EXAMINATIONS STUDY.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

The study director reported to the Study Steering Committee in late June that 1,439 of the 2,305 adult respondents had indicated a willingness to be interviewed if the need arose and had provided a name, address and telephone number where they could be reached. The Committee directed that interviews be conducted with a 2-3 percent sample of adults from each group and that written thanks be sent by the study director to all those persons willing to be interviewed but not selected.

The interview was structured to perform a vaildation function as well as to determine: (a) whether the questions were clear to the respondents, (b) whether respondents have additional ideas regarding some of the main topics, and (c) what reasons respondents had for their answers to key questions.

For details with respect to sampling procedures used for selecting interviewees, the reader is referred to the TECHNICAL REPORT on the GRADE 12 EXAMINATIONS STUDY.

FOOTNOTES TO SECTION I

1. Wallace, David "A Case For and Against Mail Questionnaires", **Public Opinion Quarterly**, XVIII, (1964), Pages 40-52.

2. Ibid., Page 44

SECTION II

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Introduction

As previously stated, the questionnaire was designed to gather opinions on the question of what has happened to the quality of education in Alberta since compulsory grade 12 departmental examinations were dropped in 1973. As a logical extension of this assignment the study attempted to find out what the people thought should be done.

This section presents a summary of positions taken by various groups on "what has happened" to standards in education in Alberta since the decision was made to eliminate all compulsory departmental examinations. A further section in Volume II discusses what the people think "ought to happen".

Has there been a change in the quality of education in Alberta?

In discussing the responses of the people, it is important to put the question in perspective. As part of the questionnaire, the various groups were asked to indicate whether they thought the quality of education had changed within the past five years, and then to indicate (where appropriate) whether the change was for the better or worse. It should be noted here that the questionnaire item had referred to "quality of education" in terms of standards of student achievement (amount learned).

About 80 percent of the respondents in

each group thought that there had been a change in the quality of education in the past five years. Generally speaking, the groups who were more closely associated with the educational scene were less definite on whether the change had been for the better or worse. Superintendents, consultants and principals voted marginally in favor of the change being for the better whereas trustees and teachers voted marginally in favor of a change for the worse. The public, employer groups and post secondary school respondents were more definite in their vote to the change being for the worse.

Have standards of achievement changed?

The groups were asked more specifically if they thought that the standards of student achievement had risen, stayed the same or dropped in each of four subjects: Mathematics, English, Social Studies, and Sciences. In all groups, most respondents thought that the standards of achievement in English had dropped. For Mathematics, the groups associated with education (trustees, superintendents, teachers, students, principals, education consultants) thought that the standard had remained about the same. Both the employer groups and the public thought that the standard had dropped. The most common responses for most groups on the science question was that the standard had either risen or remained the same. In Social Studies the responses indicated either a steady or declining standard of performance.

How great has the influence of the withdrawal of departmental examinations been in relation to other influences?

Apart from the withdrawal of examinations

there are many other phenomena that have affected the quality of education in the province of Alberta. The study wanted to find out where dropping the departmental examinations would fit in relation to other influences. To this end, a list of potential influences was drawn up and respondents were asked to indicate whether or not each influence was good, bad, or of no consequence. Although the respondents were not asked to rank the influences, it was decided to use the proportion of respondents who indicated that a particular influence was a good or bad one, as an indication of that group's perception of the rank order of the influences. It should be noted that this after-the-fact rank ordering is recognized to be an assumptive leap.

The public rated the influence of withdrawal of examinations in fourth place behind "change in student study habits", "change in lifestyle of teenagers", and "change in society". Forty-two percent thought that the withdrawal of examinations was a bad influence, whereas 17 percent read it as a good influence.

The trustees rated examination withdrawal in ninth place. Again 42 percent thought it a bad influence, 27 percent thought it a good influence. The most commonly selected influences were changes in society, changes in teenage lifestyle and changes in family lifestyle.

The superintendents rated examination withdrawal in eighth place. Like the other groups, lifestyle and study habits were more commonly selected influences. In the case of examinations, 41 percent of the superintendents thought the influence was bad, whereas 36 percent thought that it was a good influence. The consultants results were similar to the superintendents, except consultants gave top rating to the good effects of changing course content.

The students rated examination withdrawal in the last place. Only 17 percent thought that the elimination of the compulsory nature of examinations was a bad influence, whereas 33 percent read it as a good influence. The "change in course content" was rated by the students in first place. Fifty-two percent thought that the change in course content was a good influence whereas eight percent read it as a bad influence. Following closely behind as a good influence was the "change in teaching methods" with a 47 percent vote. The "change in family lifestyles" and "change in lifestyles of teenagers" were rated in last place. In fact, the majority felt that the change in lifestyles was of no consequence.

Principals and teachers gave similar responses, placing examinations in 12 th and 13 th places respectively. Top influences appeared to be lifestyle influences and changes in society. The principals also included changes in course content as a high positive influence, and teachers added changes in student study habits as a negative influence. In their ratings of the examination, both groups voted for it in the positive direction. (35 percent of principals, and 30 percent of the teachers rated it as a good influence; and 31 percent and 27 percent rated it bad).

The post secondary school and employers groups all placed the withdrawal of examinations in second position with about 60 percent in each group rating it as a bad influence. Other factors that were placed ahead of it, (or tied with it) were changes in teenage lifestyle and changes in study habits.

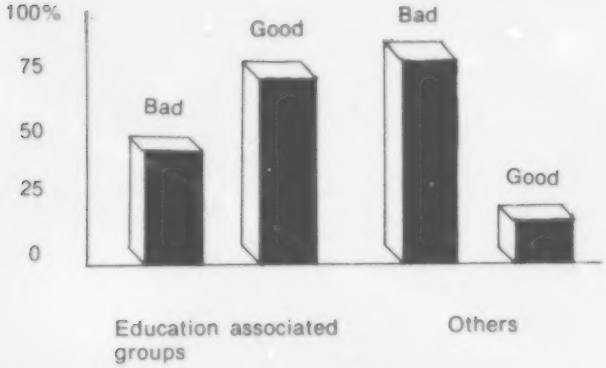
As indicated by Table XXV, in general, there appears to be a good deal of difference between the views of groups directly associated with education, and those that are more indirectly involved with it. Although all groups have noted

tne influence of a changing lifestyle, the education system associated groups do not seem to give the withdrawal of examinations the same importance as the other groups. Perhaps this is in part caused by a reaction to the questionnaire itself. Since the questionnaire is primarily concerned with grade twelve departmental examinations, respondents outside of the field of education might have taken this as indicating the importance of it as a factor.

TABLE XXV

Influence of withdrawal of examinations on "quality of education".

Chart reflecting differences in perceptions amongst various groups.



Having considered the context of the changing quality of education in the province, and having noted that the withdrawal of examinations is just one of many possible influences on education, it is useful to look at the views of the

various respondents toward more specific aspects of the grade twelve departmental examinations.

What have been some of the things that have happened since departmental examinations were withdrawn?

In developing the questionnaire for determining the perceptions of various groups toward the grade 12 examinations, the Study Steering Committee studied lists of reasons that may have contributed to the decision made in 1973 to drop the examinations. It then considered listings of some of the consequences of the decision, both those that were anticipated and those that were not anticipated in 1973. From these lists, part of the questionnaire was developed to determine the views of the groups on what had happened up to now.

In interpreting the results a few decisions were made. In the case of scales using five points (SA, A, U, D, SD), the SA and A categories were combined, as were the D and SD categories. Whenever 50 percent of the respondents in a group responded in a single category, it was taken as a group consensus.

The first set of questions asked for views about the educational scene since the dropping of the examinations. The questions did not necessarily imply that the dropping of examinations was a causal factor, although that interpretation cannot be precluded.

Relationships to attendance

The questionnaire item stated that: since examinations were dropped, "school attendance has improved". Most groups disagreed with this statement, although there was a tendency

amongst the post secondary respondents and students to be undecided. There are several ways that the question of attendance could be viewed. Examinations could tend to force students to attend for fear of missing something important, or it could be argued that attendance should go up if examinations are dropped since teachers are free to construct activities to meet the needs of individual students. The former notion seems more supported by the questionnaire.

Relationships to grading standards

The item said that since examinations were dropped "fewer students fail grade twelve". This was a question of fact and all groups agreed (60 to 70 percent) with the fact that fewer students do fail grade twelve.

A second statement of fact, "that more students get A's, was greeted with less consensus. The responses of most groups were in the 40 to 60 percent range of agreement with the statement. While the public at large and students indicated agreement at the 34 percent level, the former group had a 30 percent undecided vote. This is not surprising since the public has limited access to the facts.

A related statement, "it is difficult to find out how well students in Alberta are achieving", was agreed to by about 70 to 80 percent of each group except students indicating that they had no easily obtainable information on the subject. The students were the sole exception here; their most common response was agreement, but only 42 percent gave it.

Not only do most respondents find it difficult to find out how well students are doing, they may even be more confused by the lack of comparability of grading practices across schools.

Most respondents in each group (over 90 percent in many groups) agreed to the statement that "An A in one school does not mean the same as an A in another school".

Relationships to the quality of education in the school

Three questions in this section related to internal activities in the school. About two thirds of the respondents in each group disagreed with the statement that "students' study habits had improved". About 60 percent disagreed with the statement that "teachers are more demanding of their students". About half the respondents disagreed with the statement that "subjects such as automotives and music are now considered as important as some of the examination subjects". The post secondary respondents and the employers groups were less certain in their responses. The study had hypothesized that one of the consequences of having examinations was that some of the subjects were not treated with the same importance as the examinations subjects. According to most perceptions, this was a correct assumption.

Relationships with outside agencies.

Two questions were directed specifically to the employers and post secondary groups. The first, "employers have more difficulty in selecting employees", was agreed to by about 50 percent of each of these groups. Interestingly enough, the school related groups all disagreed with the statement. It would be interesting to ask employers if they actually used the grade twelve marks in their assessment of potential employees, or if this is only a minor factor. The 50 percent

value suggests that the problem may not be a significant one.

The second "external" statement was: "Alberta high school graduates are better prepared for careers and further schooling". About 70 percent of the employers and post secondary respondents disagreed with this statement, whereas in the various school related groups the respondents tended to be more undecided. This may be because the external groups are not as aware of the detailed goals of the school, or it may be because the educational groups are reluctant to make an assertion that reflects on their own competence.

What are some of the factors that may have been caused by eliminating compulsory departmental examinations?

With the second set of questions, an attempt was made to gather views on causal links between the dropping of the compulsory examinations and various areas of the school scene.

Effects on educational flexibility

One of the arguments posed in favor of dropping departmental examinations was that the curriculum could become more flexible if it was no longer under the implicit control of the year end examination. Three statements were directed toward flexibility. All groups strongly agreed that one of the results of dropping the examinations was that there "was more opportunity to adjust courses to the needs of local students". Less agreement characterized the responses to the statement that "dropping the examinations

brought about better provisions for students who need special help''. Principals, teachers, students, trustees and superintendents tended to agree with the statement, while other groups tended to disagree, but in most cases only 40 to 50 percent of the respondents agreed on a single response. All groups except the students disagreed with the statement ''that dropping the examinations resulted in better provision for the brighter students''. The proportion of respondents disagreeing with the statement was in the 50 to 60 range.

Effects on teachers

Three statements related to the effects on teachers of dropping the examinations. Most respondents in each group (except for principals and teachers) disagreed with the statement that ''a consequence was better teaching''. In the case of teachers and principals the most common response was ''undecided''. The study guessed that there might be some possibility that teachers would feel a ''loss of a sense of achievement'' after the withdrawal of the examinations since they would not have the feedback on the success that their efforts had produced. However, 53 percent of the teachers disagreed with this statement. The other groups showed a similar lack of agreement. Most respondents in all groups agreed with the statement that ''the dropping of examinations had resulted in more professional responsibility for teachers'', a view that is consistent with the early views of the professional associations.

Effects on students

There were five statements related to the consequences on students of dropping the examinations. About 60 percent of the respond -

ents in the non-student groups felt that there had been "a decline in student effort". A similar proportion agreed that "students get less training in working under pressure", but about 50 percent agreed that "there was a lessening of undue stress on students". This might suggest that there are both good and bad things associated with the pressure of examinations. Perhaps some of the pressure is good training, but too much can be dysfunctional.

One of the statements suggests that dropping of examinations might have produced a "loss of sense of achievement for students". The responses tended to fall into two distinct groups. Respondents closely associated with the schools tended to disagree (about 40 percent disagreed in each group). Sixty-six percent of the students disagreed, but because they had not experienced the examinations it might be difficult for them to make the comparison. About 50 percent of the public and employer groups thought that there would be a loss of a sense of achievement. Many of these people would have experienced the examinations, and their responses are of some interest for that reason.

It had been speculated that the withdrawal of the examinations might lead to "better self discipline on the part of students" since they no longer had the strong external motivation of the examinations. About 60 percent of the non-student respondents disagreed with the suggestion that students displayed more self discipline.

One statement dealt with a more general matter: did the dropping of the examinations lead to "a decrease in the status of the high school diploma"? Most respondents agreed with this statement. From the responses, it was difficult to determine if the respondents had made the discrimination between the high school diploma

and senior matriculation. It may be that the comparison was between the present diploma and the one earned prior to the elimination of compulsory examinations.

General effect

The final general statement was phrased in the following way: "dropping the examinations has resulted in generally more good than harm". Although the most common responses were disagreement with the statement, in most groups the proportions were in the 40 to 50 percent range, indicating that there was not a strong consensus on this question.

Arguments for and against the return of compulsory departmental examinations.

In an attempt to assess the kinds of reasons that the respondents might find appropriate to a discussion on bringing back grade twelve departmental examinations, the questionnaire had two lists of points that might be used to support or refute the proposition. Eleven reasons were presented to the respondents as points against bringing the examinations back, and ten reasons were listed in favor. Where two thirds of the respondents agreed on a reason, it was taken to be a strong reason.

The public at large indicated three reasons against bringing the examinations back. These were: (a) evaluation of students should be based on the year's work, (b) non-examination subjects are not considered to be as important as examination subjects, and (c) the multiple choice format did not allow testing all of the different kinds of student achievement. Six reasons reached the two-thirds criterion in favor of bringing

examinations back. These were: (a) examinations had the effect of keeping the instruction in each course about the same across the province, (b) examinations meant that all students in the province were judged on the same basis, (c) the examination certified achievement at the particular standard for the grade twelve level, (d) student learned to work under pressure, (e) students were more likely to work hard, and (f) provincial standards were maintained.

Interestingly, the trustees produced the same set of reasons as the public for bringing the examinations back, and agreed on the first four of the reasons in favor of the return of examinations. The other two reasons did not quite reach the two-thirds criterion set. These results suggest that in this case the trustees' views are consistent with their constituents'.

All groups agreed that the following were reasons against bringing back the examination: evaluation of students should be based on the year's work; the multiple choice format was too restrictive; and non-examinations subjects were not given the importance that they deserved. Most of these groups agreed that the examinations tended to standardize course content, that all students in the province were judged on the same basis, and that the examinations certified a particular standard of achievement.

The principals and teachers also noted that another reason against bringing back the examinations was that teachers taught to the examination and did not make provisions for the different needs of students in their classes.

The post secondary school respondents also chose the common reasons, but in addition, 90 percent of them agreed that provincial standards would be maintained if examinations were returned. Consistent with their positions, two

thirds of them noted that employers, universities, colleges and technical schools would know the quality of the applicant that they are getting if examinations were returned.

The employer groups who were in other respects similar to the post secondary respondents, did not select the "knowledge of quality" reason as a point in favor of the return of examinations. Unlike the teacher group, the employers and post secondary groups seemed to assert the motivational qualities of the examinations by selecting "students were more likely to study hard" as one of the points in favor of returning to the departmental examination system.

The student group produced only one reason in favor of examinations; that was "provincial standards would be maintained". They argeed with the usual reasons against bringing the examinations back, but were strong (90 percent) in their view that evaluation should be based on the year's work.

In summary, the most compelling of the listed arguments against bringing the exams back were the multiple choice format, the importance of non-examination subjects, and the desirability of evaluating students on the entire year's work. The most agreed upon reasons across groups for returning to examinations were the questions of comparability in curriculum and in standards and the certification of a standard of achievement.

Summary

In considering the analysis of the first portion of the questionnaire, it must be kept in mind that the results have been expressed as trends within each of the respondent groups. These trends do not necessarily represent the

strongly held opinions of each and every person within each group.

Generally most respondents think that changes have occurred in the past five years. Respondents from outside the professional educational community tend to feel that the change has been for the worse. Insiders may be more knowledgeable, or they may be too close to the situation to make accurate judgements. Outsiders might be merely nostalgic, or they may view the scene with a greater degree of detachment. One thing is true: there are differing points of view held by the majorities in the two groups.

As a factor in the change, examination withdrawal was rated below lifestyle factors in all groups. In the educational groups it is far behind.

It seems clear that the various groups saw a lack of common standards across the province as being a problem. The examinations were viewed as comparable guideposts and nothing appears to have replaced them for this function.

The withdrawal of examinations seems to have allowed more program flexibility but this has not necessarily meant better provisions for individual students. The main effect on teachers has been increased professional responsibility. It may be true that there are as many interpretations of professional responsibility as there are teachers, and each teacher working in a defensible fashion would not necessarily produce common standards.

In considering arguments for and against bringing departmental examinations back, there are three common ones against such a move: (a) evaluation should be on the year's work, (b) the multiple choice format is too restrictive, and (c) non-examination subjects tend to be treated as second class subjects. Of course two of these

objections could be overcome by using different examination practices. The first is more difficult. Arguments that seemed favorable to the return of examinations were the maintenance of comparable standards across the province and certification of a known level of achievement. Interestingly enough, even though the majority of respondents agreed with the latter reason, there was nothing in the grade twelve departmental examinations that were conducted that guaranteed this. Also, although students could be compared within a year, there was no guarantee of comparability across years.

The arguments surrounding the depart - mental examinations are not simple ones. Some of the intentions that surrounded their withdrawal may not have been realized, others have. Societal change has confounded the issue, making it difficult to reach a clear perception of ''What has happened''?

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

OF THE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

Introduction

Except for the questionnaires given to the grade 12 student respondents, all copies of the questionnaire contained a section on the back page which included the following statement: ''Should the need arise, and you are selected for a private interview to discuss what has happened or is happening to the 'quality' of education in Alberta, would you be willing to take the time to talk to us''? Respondents answering ''yes'' to this question were requested to provide name, address and telephone number.

In late June 1,439 of the 2,305 adult respondents (non-student) had indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. Because of this over-whelming response, the Study Steering Committee instructed that interviews be conducted with 2-3 percent sample of those adults from each group. The purposes established for the interviews were: (a) To determine how respondents interpreted several key words and phrases in the questionnaire. For example,did respondents use the questionnaire's definition of ''quality of education'' as equivalent to ''standards of student achievement'' or did respondents use their own definitions? (b) To obtain more information on the reasons people had for their answers to several major questions; (c) To inquire about any apparently contradictory answers by respondents such as a respondent's answer of ''strongly agree'' (SA) to both of the following statements; ''The provincial government should bring back compulsory grade 12 examinations'' and ''The provincial government should inspect schools periodically to determine whether they maintain acceptable standards rather than bring back compulsory examinaitons''; (d) To determine what knowledge a sample of respondents might have regarding a topic not directly covered in the questionnaire but significant to the general study: do respondents know of any cases, or have they heard rumors concerning school system use of grade 12 examination results as a means of course assignment, transfer, or termination of teachers? (e) To provide a sample of respondents with an opportunity to elaborate on their answers to specific questions of interest to them and/or to point out areas which might have been explored further.

The selection procedures for the interviews involved drawing a random sample of respondents

in each of the non-student categories (e.g., post-secondary institution officials, trustees, teachers). This technique was intended to ensure a reasonable proportion of representation from each non-student group. A team of experienced interviewers held interviews with a total of twenty-nine respondents. For details with respect to sampling procedures and interview format used, and names of personnel on the interview team, the reader is referred to the TECHNICAL REPORT of the GRADE 12 EXAMINATIONS STUDY.

On average the interviews lasted about one and a quarter hours, but ranged from three quarters to one-and-a-half hours. The respondents were encouraged to speak freely regarding various specific areas covered by the questionnaire and also regarding related educational issues of concern to them. All respondents were guaranteed anonymity regarding direct quotes or other direct reference to their individual responses. In order to assist this anonymity for respondents in categories with very few persons interviewed, such as superintendents, quotes from respondents are identified only according to the following categories: (a) public at large (including trustees), (b) service receivers (employers and post - secondary educational officials), (c) teachers, (d) principals, and (e) central office officials (consultants and superintendents).

Limitations

This section presents a summary of positions taken by interviewees on "what has happened". A further section in Volume II discusses what the respondents said with respect to future practices in evaluation. It is worth stressing that in consideration of the responses

reported in the following section, readers should note that researchers generally agree that about thirty interviews are a satisfactory overall check on responses to a questionnaire. However, when the respondents are subdivided into various categories such as the categories used in the sampling for the study, the total of thirty is not sufficient for confidently making general statements about any one subgroup or category. For instance, while the five interviews conducted with high school principals contribute to an understanding of the responses of the overall total of 1,439 people who were willing to be interviewed, five is too few a number for making any general statement about the category of 162 principals who were willing to be interviewed. The five interviews contribute only to assumptions about what the overall population of 1439 potential interviewees thinks about the issues raised in the questionnaire. Thus the data gathered from the interviews are not treated by the interviewees' categories or subgroups. Responses are treated only as part of the information gathered from the total of twenty-nine interviews and are reliable only in terms of the representativeness that those twenty-nine have for the total population willing to be interviewed. Further, no valid assumptions can be made about the relationship of this data to the responses of the people who are not willing to be interviewed, a group numbering 866, or about 38 percent of the total non-student population receiving and returning the questionnaire.

What do you think has happened?

The first major area addressed in the interviews was how respondents interpreted the two key words in the stems ("since" and "has

resulted'') of the first two groups of statements. How did respondents interpret ''since'' in the stem of ''since the examinations were dropped:''? Did the respondent think of since as implying cause and effect or merely sequence? For example, for the statement ''since the examinations were dropped, fewer students fail grade 12'', did the interviewee think the statement suggested that fewer students fail grade 12 because the examinations were dropped, or merely that the two events have a certain relationship in time?

Of the 29 persons interviewed, 12 thought that the stem implied a cause-effect relationship, 13 thought not, two thought the matter varies according to which of the ten items is being answered, and one thought that the stem implies neither cause nor simple time relationship. One thought that the matter of sequence versus causality is less significant than the question of whether an answer of ''undecided'' is the same as ''don't know''. Some sections of the questionnaire had a column for marking ''undecided'' and some for marking ''don't know''. None has both columns, yet there is a clear distinction between indecision and lack of knowledge. One of the respondents who answered the statements as implying cause and effect also mentioned during the interview that a ''don't know'' column should have been included throughout the questionnaire. Respondents exhibited little difference of opinion regarding use of the words ''has resulted'' in the other stem. Twenty-five respondents assumed that the words implied a cause-effect relationship. One reiterated his ''don't know'' position, and three stressed variance from question to question. Obviously there was some confusion regarding the intent behind the first set of statements but very little regarding the second set.

Quality versus quantity

The next major question to interview respondents was whether they used the survey's definition of "quality of education" as equivalent to "standards of student achievement" and "standards of student achievement" as equivalent to "amount learned". Only four respondents out of 29 were willing to equate quality with standards and standards with amount learned. Two other respondents used slightly modified forms of the questionnaire's definition of quality, 21 ignored the offered definition and used their own. Two respondents could not remember whether they had used the given definition.

Most respondents stressed that their own definition, which they used in answering the survey questions, is much broader than the definition of quality used in the questionnaire.

Some examples of respondent definitions for quality of education are highlighted below:

"Competence" (Member of public)
"The way things were 20 years ago" (Member of public)
"Graduating kids with their heads screwed on and with the skills to become good citizens; quality and standards don't mix" (Central office official)
"Can't define quality, only standards" (Member of public)
"Availability of options, individualized programs" (Member of public)
"Ability, attitude of student, plus quality of materials and presentation" (Principal)
"Preparedness for society, work, university; experience with people and usd of knowledge" (Member of public)
"How the student did at school, how well, how he coped, what he gained in knowledge and experience" (Member of public)
"Preparation for job field, attitudes, knowledge and ability to use learning in later life" (Member of public)

"Amount of knowledge and ability to apply it to everyday life" (Member of public)
"Teacher training and students' aptitude and attitude" (Member of public)
"Focus of individual growth and development which facilitates a social awareness and sensitivity" (Representative of receiving agency)
"Broadly conceived and over 20 years of comparison" (Principal)
"In terms of university and Department of Education standards" (Principal)
"Learning better, not just amount" (Teacher)
"Teacher preparation and input, plus student achievement" (Principal)
"Cognitive and affective, self-concept, 3 R's, and level of achievement" (Central office official)
"Broadly; difficult to apply the questionnaire's definition to some of the questions offered" (Teacher)
"Thinking beyond standards to a whole set of societal expectations such as the value of doing a thorough job and not just for monetary reward" (Teacher)

Regarding the equation of "standards of student achievement" with "amount learned", several interview respondents pointed out that this definition, when tied to the questionnaire's definition of quality, equated with amount learned. In other words, the questionnnaire equates quality with quantity. Most interviewees did not accept this equation as all that valid. Some of the definitions gleaned from discussions are the following;

"Related to preparation for the world, not to course content directly; involves reliability, other traits and tools for learning" (Principal)
"Qualitative at least for English and Social Studies; more but not entirely, quantitative for Maths and Sciences" (Principal)
"Qualitative, quantitative, plus overall effects of attitude change" (Principal)
"Amount learned re: specific skills, knowledge, course objectives" (Central office official) (This

appears to be the same as the questionnaire's definition)
"Perhaps amount in Maths, certainly qualitative otherwise" (Central office official)
"Level of achievement, not amount learned" (Principal)
"Useful standards must be interpreted as qualitative" (Teacher)

In summary then, the discussion focused primarily on the question of a definition of quality. In the cases where standards were discussed in some detail, respondents generally stressed the importance of keeping in mind quality as an aspect of standards. In most cases the issue of quality was clearly separated from the question of amount learned. It is evident that whatever else respondents mean by quality and standards, they do not think that the quality of education is the same thing as standards of student achievement and that such standards are the same thing as amount learned.

Quality of education now, better or worse than five years ago? or has it changed at all?

The next major area discussed in interviews was the reason interviewees had for answering "better' or "worse" to the above question. Three of the interviewees had originally answered "no change" to the question. However. during the interview one person changed his answer to "yes" and added that quality had changed for the worse. Counting this change, 14 (48 percent) respondents think the quality of education has worsened in the past five years, 11 (38 percent) think the change is for the better, two (7 percent) think there has been no change, Of the 14 who think quality is generally worse now, many gave more than one

reason for the decline. The reasons cited, including the written comments provided by two respondents when they originally filled out the questionnaire, are summarized below:

	Number of times mentioned
Less emphasis on 3 R's and basic concepts	5
Decline in students' attitude toward school work	5
Emphasis on broad but superficial range of knowledge	4
Marks inflation	3
Diluted standards by passing poor students	3
Teachers not emphasizing achievement	3
Decline in quality and quantity	2
Influence of part-time jobs, other outside factors	2
Not well prepared for making decisions	1
Lack of standardized tests for use by teachers	1
Scope and content of curriculum difficult to assess	1
Catering too much to immediate interests of students instead of to long range needs and responsibility	1
Semester system breaks up continuity in learning	1

However, three of the respondents who think educational quality is generally worse also cited some positive changes: more academic freedom for teachers, more provision for

individual students, benefits of students staying in school longer, and increased opportunities for learning. The 11 respondents who think that educational quality is better cited the following reasons:

	Number of times mentioned
Students have broader, more relevant knowledge	5
More diversified programs, broader view of education	3
High school no longer focussed only on university	2
More students going further in school	2
More flexibility to assist individual student	2
More emphasis on quality than quantity	2
Better curriculum	2
Teachers have more clout now regarding attendance and importance of daily work (if they use the clout)	1
Higher standards now in some courses than when departmentals allowed failing only 10 percent of students	1

However, four respondents who think education is generally better in quality do think that there is a mixed bag because of: a decline in the technical skills in English usage, possibly short-changing of the brightest students, possible problems in setting a good atmosphere in the larger schools, and a decline in the status of the high school diploma although not necessarily in the status of matriculation.

Have standards of achievement in Mathematics, English, Social Studies and Sciences changed?

The interviewees were asked to discuss their specific answers if they had said that standards of student achievement had "risen" or "dropped". The interview team concentrated on Mathematics and English, but recorded comments in Social Studies and Sciences as well.

Table XXVI indicates how the interviewees had responded to the items when the questionnaires were completed by them.

TABLE XXVI

STANDARD OF ACHIEVEMENT

Count and percentages of total interviewees and responses recorded with respect to each subject.

	R (risen)	S (same)	D (dropped)	U (uncertain)*
Mathematics	12 (41%)	4 (14%)	7 (24%)	5 (17%)
English	3 (10%)	6 (21%)	16 (55%)	3 (10%)
Social Studies	4 (14%)	7 (24%)	10 (34%)	7 (24%)
Sciences	10 (34%)	7 (24%)	6 (21%)	5 (17%)

* "Uncertain" includes responses of one person who changed his response to each question from "Risen" to "Uncertain" during the interview.

TABLE XXVII

STATEMENTS MADE BY INTERVIEWEES REGARDING INCREASE OR DECREASE IN AMOUNT LEARNED IN SPECIFIC SUBJECTS DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS.

Mathematics	**Number of respondents**
Increase in amount learned	
Amount learned has increased	4
Understanding and applying more advanced concepts	3
Curriculum has kept pace with technology	1
No complaints from universities	1
More assistance for both the brighter and weaker students	1
Decrease in amount learned	**Number of respondents**
More are doing worse	2
Lacking in basic arithmetic because of new math	2
Own child's experience with poor teacher	1
English	
Increase in amount learned	**Number of respondents**
Influence perhaps of media	1
More learned in high school now than used to learn during first year of university	1
Decrease in amount learned	**Number of respondents**
Ignoring grammar, spelling, other mechanics and writing	4
Poor oral and writing skills	3
Loss of expertise in correct communication although students now have more to say	2
Too much audio-visual approach	2
Loss of 20-credit requirement for English	2
Loss of continuity in learning language arts skills because of semester system	1
Loss of time for evaluating written work	1
Brighter students have less time for in-depth learning	1
Undisciplined thinking and poor standards re: written assignments	1
Too much freedom for teachers to the detriment of content	1
Proof is in the poor writing of universit, students	1

TABLE XXVIII

STATEMENTS MADE BY INTERVIEWEES REGARDING INCREASE OR DECREASE IN AMOUNT LEARNED IN SPECIFIC SUBJECTS DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS.

Social Studies

Increase in amount learned	**Number of respondents**
Shift to issue-oriented approach has increased awareness	2

Decrease in amount learned	**Number of respondents**
Superficial discussion with no foundation for opinions	3
Too few sources of information available in most schools	1
Too much freedom, no tools to handle it	1
Curriculum all mixed up	1
Curriculum too hard for some and too easy for others	1
No concept of geography or knowledge of other peoples	1
No clear cut sense of responsibilies student owes to society (but the person giving this opinion said the old Social Studies program didn't produce responsible people either)	1

Sciences

Increase in amount learned	**Number of respondents**
Students know more than before	2
Curriculum more enriched, challenging, and more accommodating to individuals	2
No complaints from universities about science students	1
More inquiry, experimentation, in-depth study	1
Better teaching methods and science equipment	1
Has kept pace with technology	1

Decrease in amount learned	**Number of respondents**
Students have poorer attitude, poor work habits	1

It is not known how these responses compare with the total number of adult respondents who were willing to be interviewed. Compared to all adult respondents, whether or not willing to be interviewed, there is one significant discrepancy. The interviewers were asked to concentrate on the Mathematics and English areas because these subjects had been identified by the total of adult respondents to the survey as the areas with the greatest drops in standards of achievement. However, among the interview respondents Mathematics was identified as the area in which respondents appeared to be most satisfied with achievement levels. In the other subjects the interview respondents reflect much the same views as the total number of adult respondents. For both the persons interviewed and the total number of adult respondents to the survey, only in the area of English is there a majority opinion that standards have declined.

Questionnaire statements for and against bringing back compulsory departmental grade 12 examinations.

The study was concerned with whether or not the statements listed in the questionnaire under reasons for and reasons against were perceived by the respondent to properly belong in the chosen categories. For example, did the respondents think that some statements listed under reasons against bringing back compulsory examinations really belong on the list of reasons for bringing them back. Further, did the respondent answer in terms of whether or not the statements on each list really are good reasons for or against the examinations or did the respondents agree or disagree with the statement without reference to their acceptability as arguments for or

against examinations.

Transferability of statements

The written comments from a few of the total number of adult respondents to the survey indicate that some of the items on the list of reasons against bringing back departmental examinations should be on the opposite list. For instance, the statement "Non - examination subjects were not considered to be as important as examination subjects", provoked the written response "Nor should they be". However, only one person interviewed thought that some of the items were transferable between the lists of reasons for or against.

Weighing of arguments

The interviewers asked whether respondents answered the statement in terms of their value as reasons for or against bringing back examinations or solely in terms of the accuracy of the statements without reference to their weight as arguments pro or con. The thought behind this exercise was that a person could have one of several meanings for an answer of "Agree" or "Disagree" for a question. For instance, an answer of "Agree" to the statement "the multiple choice format did not allow for testing all of the different kinds of student achievement" might mean any of one of several things including: "I agree that this happened", "I agree that this happened and that this is a good reason against departmental examinations", or "I agree that this happened but this is not a good reason against departmental examinations".

Of 29 persons interviewed, only six had weighed the merit of the statements as arguments

according to their listing as reasons for or against the departmentals. Twenty respondents had treated the statements only in terms of "Yes, I agree (or disagree) that this is the case". Three respondents could not recall how they had viewed the statements.

Multiple choice answers test format

The manner of treatment is a matter of serious consequence in interpreting the views of respondents. For the statement, "The multiple choice format did not allow for testing all of the different kinds of student achievement", it is one thing to agree that the tests have limitations, and quite another to say that these limitations are a reason for not bringing back the departmental examinations. While 28 of the 29 interview respondents were critical of multiple choice tests, apparently only six consider the limitations of these tests as in themselves good reasons for not having departmentals. Twenty respondents separated the issue of the quality of the multiple choice tests from the issue of the desirability of departmentals. In discussion of the reasons for their answers of "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to the "multiple choice" format, many respondents expressed very strong opinions against these tests but suggested that compulsory examinations need not be entirely or even partially in this format.

SUMMARY

The interview was structured to perform a validation function, as well as to determine: (a) Whether the questions were clear to the respondents; (b) Whether respondents had additional ideas regarding what has happened to the quality of education since 1973; (c) What reasons respondents had for their answers to key questions. Generally the findings gleaned from personal interviews validate the information contained in the completed questionnaires received from all non-student respondents in the survey sample. Comments made by the interviewees stating reasons for answers to key questions are similar in content to those made by the several thousand questionnaire respondents.

Most interviewees think that changes have occurred in the past five years. Those belonging to the educational community tend to feel that the change has been for the better. Interviewees who are non-educationists feel the change has been for the worse. It also seemed quite clear that interviewees, as did the total respondent adult population, saw a lack of common standards across the province as being a problem. In considering the interviewees' reasons for and against bringing back compulsory departmental examinations, there are two common reasons against such a move: (a) evaluation should be on the year's work, and (b) the multiple choice format is too restrictive. The arguments which seemed favorable to the return of examinations was the maintenance of comparable standards across the province.

As was the case for the questionnaire data, the interviews did not provide a clear picture of "what has happened" to the quality of education since departmental examinations were dropped, nor was there any degree of consensus on the meaning of the term "quality of education".

PART I INTERPRETATION

SECTION I

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Introduction

Having investigated the perceptions of various groups towards some of the consequences of dropping compulsory grade 12 examinations, the study went on to attempt to find out what the people thought should be done now.

This section discusses positions taken by the participants with respect to future practices in evaluation. The number of tables was kept to a minimum in order to enhance the readability of the text.

Should the provincial government bring back compulsory grade 12 examinations?

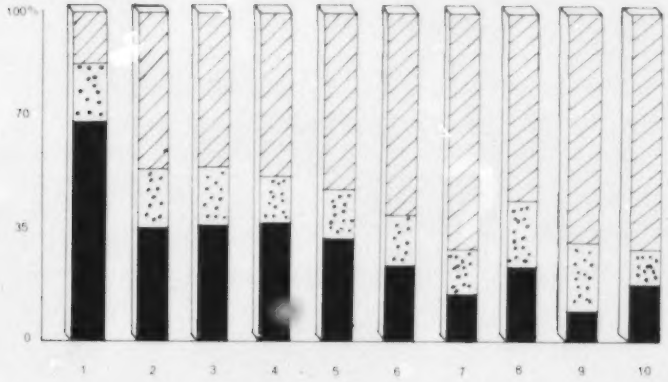
This was the central question of the "what do you think ought to happen" portion of the questionnaire.

As indicated in Table XXXII for all groups, except for the teachers, principals and students, the majority of respondents thought that the departmental examinations should be reinstated. The percentages ran in the 70 percent range for the employer groups, and post secondary educators, about 60 percent for the public and trustees, and about 53 percent for education consultants. Forty-eight percent of respondents in the teacher and principal groups agreed with the return to compulsory examinations, whereas 34 percent and 15 percent respectively disagreed.

S OF PUBLICS' OPINIONS

TABLE XXXII

CHART SHOWING PERCENTAGE OF OPINIONS OF EACH SAMPLE GROUP ABOUT THE STATEMENT: "THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD BRING BACK COMPULSORY GRADE 12 EXAMINATIONS".



Agree

Undecided

Disagree

1. Students, 2. Teachers, 3, Principals, 4. Education Consultants, 5. Superintendents, 6. Trustees, 7. Post secondary school personnel, 8. Public at large, 9. Public sector employers, 10. Private sector employers.

Only 16 percent of the students agreed with bringing back the examinations, whereas 67 percent disagreed. Of some interest is the difference of opinion on the question between student, teacher and principal groups in Edmonton and Calgary and other areas of the province. Student disagreement with the return of compulsory examinations ranged from 55 percent against in a rural area to 71 percent against in the city of Calgary. A similar difference of perceptions exists between principals in a large city and those in a rural area. The vote against ranged from a low of 27 percent of the principals in a rural area to 42 percent for the city of Edmonton principals. On the other hand, teachers from rural and small urban centre schools tended to oppose the return to compulsory examinations in a greater number than the city of Edmonton teachers.

In an effort to check the reliability of the general question, respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "there shouldn't be any change in the way students are currently being tested for achievement".
group disagreed with this question than those who agreed with the idea that grade twelve examinations should be brought back-the reason being that bringing back grade twelve departmental examinations is only one of the many possible revisions that could be made. Except for the students, less that 20 percent of the respondents thought that the present system for testing student achievement should be retained. In the student group 42 percent thought that it should be retained.

Before looking at alternatives, it is useful

to look at two ideas that were presented to the respondents. Examinations are only one part of the evaluation system. The study hypothesized that there may be some organizational problems inherent in the present system that prevent parents, teachers and even students from being able to keep track of progress. The two suggestions were: (a) All schools should provide an information booklet to students and parents which includes a statement of objectives, course description, grading system and graduating requirements; (b) Teachers should provide students early in the year with course outlines and evaluation procedures to be used during the term. Over 80 percent of the respondents in each group agreed with the first suggestion, and over 90 percent agreed with the second. In fact, the actual number of respondents disagreeing with the second statement was exceptionally small. It is the only statement in the entire questionnaire to realize this level of consensus.

In looking at possible changes in student evaluation practices, the study tried to consider some alternatives to bringing back departmental examinations. Several suggestions were placed before the respondents, but they were not generally described as alternatives to the departmental examination. Consequently there may have been some confusion in the minds of those answering.

One thought that was posed was, "the provincial government should inspect schools periodically to determine whether they maintain acceptable standards of student achievement rather than bringing back compulsory grade 12 examinations". This statement was posed as an alternative to the examinations, and the results are reasonably consistent with the earlier ones.

Only about 40 percent in each group responded favorably to this suggestion. (The students were the sole exception with 74 percent agreeing).

A second notion proposed was that "all students should develop a permanent portfolio of school work for each high school year so that parents, prospective employers and educational institutions beyond the high school level can judge performance". This idea was based on the portfolios that commercial artists, architects and photographers use. It was thought that is would be a way of assisting prospective employers to evaluate performance in all subjects, not just the examination ones. In addition it would emphasize to the student the importance of daily assignments. About 50 percent of the employers agreed with the suggestion, and about 30 percent disagreed. Only 24 percent of the post-secondary respondents agreed with the statement. For the other groups, the idea received between 40 and 50 percent endorsement.

One suggestion that did receive substantial support was the statement, "examinations for assessing the general achievement of students should measure both knowledge and attitudes". As most people in the measurement field will attest, this is more easily said than done. This may account for the lower proportions of teachers, principals and post-secondary educators who agreed with the statement (60 percent of the teachers, 45 percent of the post-secondary group). For other groups, the figures were above 70 percent.

If evaluation procedures are to be changed, t might imply that teachers should receive raining in new procedures. In response to the tatement, "teachers should be specifically ained to evaluate student achievement", about to 80 percent of the respondents in each group

replied in the affirmative.

One of the functions satisfied by the departmental examinations was selection. Post secondary institutions as well as some employers used the examination results to select students for their programs or positions. Unfortunately, it is difficult for a single set of examinations to have the best predictive power for the variety of opportunities that face a high school graduate. Two suggestions were made in this line: (a) Educational institutions beyond the high school level should develop their own selection procedures for admitting candidates; (b) Schools should continue to certify student achievement levels for university entrance.

Over 60 percent of the teachers agreed with the first suggestion whereas under 50 percent of the post-secondary and employer groups agreed with it. Clearly, acceptance of the suggestion would imply a considerable effort on the part of post-secondary institutions. The post-secondary group did not seem content with the second suggestion either, although 45 percent did agree to it in comparison to the 29 percent who disagreed. The teacher figures were very similar: for other groups the proportions were about 50 to 60 percent in favor.

If compulsory departmental examinations were re-introduced how should they be used?

There are many functions that the departmental examinations could be called upon to serve. The study felt that if it were decided to bring back compulsory examinations in some form, those making the decision might find some additional information useful. Thus it appeared logical to ask the respondents to react to statements about some purposes that these

examinations might serve. Consequently, the section on reintroduction of examinations was included.

One alternative suggested was that the departmental examinations should be used to determine the entire mark in a course. However, about 80 to 90 percent of the respondents in each group thought that if the examinations were reintroduced, they should be used only for part of the course mark. When asked what portion of the course mark would be appropriate, the most popular figure was 50 percent. In most groups, about 50 percent of the respondents voted for 50 percent.

It has been suggested by some people that departmental examination scores could be used to provide feedback to the teachers, and would have no other use. Although the statement was not clearly spelled out, in most of the groups, over 70 percent of the respondents disagreed with it. Within the teacher group, 22 percent agreed with the suggestion.

It was intended that one alternative indicate that the results be used for student self guidance only. Unfortunately, the alternative that appeared omitted the "only". As a result it is difficult to interpret the responses that were received. About 50 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement as it appeared, perhaps indicating that most respondents assumed that the statement was meant to indicate that student self guidance was in addition to other functions.

Between 70 and 80 percent of the respondents in most groups thought that one function that the departmental examinations could serve if they were reintroduced would be to establish expected provincial achievement levels in each subject. Only 60 percent of the principals agreed with this suggestion, and for the students,

only 43 percent agreed.

The suggestion that the examinations be used for appeals by students who were dissatisfied with the mark assigned by the teacher was meant to imply a system that is currently in use. Since this was not clearly stated, it is difficult to interpret the 60 percent agreement in each of the groups (except for the post-secondary group where the proportion was 34 percent).

The final suggestion was that the grade twelve examinations could be used for university entrance only. Less that 20 percent in each group agreed with the suggestion.

Summary

In combining the results of both parts of the study, it seems that the "non-educationist" groups would like to see the return of the compulsory departmental examinations. Most would appear to prefer a system that involved a mixture of teacher marks and departmental marks. If such a move were taken by the department, it seems clear that sole reliance on the multiple choice format would not find favor with these groups. Also, careful thought would have to be given to the non-examination subjects so that they would not be sacrificed. Some provision for local flexibility would appear necessary. Also, there is strong support from all fronts for the need for specifying the curriculum objectives and evaluation procedures before the students get too far into the course. Teachers, principals, and to some extent other educators who are somewhat removed from the classroom, are less enthusiastic than the other groups surveyed about a return to a compulsory departmental examination system. To some readers, this may seem self-serving. However, the

teachers were deeply involved in all aspects of the former departmental examinations, and were probably the only group who had first hand experience with the inadequacies of the system. Also, the pendulum of opinion swings back and forth, and it often happens that the school and especially the teacher is constantly called upon to adjust teaching styles to meet the current opinion. Possibly this leaves some teachers with a pessimism about simple solutions to complex problems.

The withdrawal of the grade 12 examinations was one of many "innovations" that hit the educational system at about the same time. Also lifestyles have changed, and perhaps even the students are different from those of the sixties. Bringing back the departmental examinations will not bring back the good old days that many of us remember. If the examinations are to be returned, there should be a careful spelling out of what they are supposed to do and a detailed evaluation to determine whether or not they are doing it.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED.

Introduction

This section presents a summary of positions taken by interviewees with respect to future practices in student evaluation. A previous section in Volume I discussed what the interviewed respondents "thought had happened" to the quality of education since compulsory departmental examinations were dropped.

While the study decided to include as part of its opinion survey several questions on what

ought to be done about grade 12 student evaluation, it was intended that the answers to such questions be used as guidelines for recommendations rather than comprise the recommendations themselves. This decision was taken because ultimately there has to be some serious consideration of the weight of facts as well as opinions. Where facts do not substantiate or where they flatly contradict opinion, facts must weigh heavily in the balance.

During the 29 interviews conducted as part of the grade 12 perceptions study a number of questions in the "ought" series were discussed in detail. The nature of the inquiries varied in the interviews depending on the survey question and the kinds of responses the person interviewed had given when filling out the questionnaire. At times, such as with the question "the provincial government should bring back compulsory grade 12 examinations", the interviewers asked for the reasons the interviewees had for their answer. Persons who had answered "agree' with the statement were asked what form they think an inspection system should take. Persons not agreeing were not asked directly to comment. but many explained why they disagreed with the inspection concept. With the question "teachers should be specifically trained to evaluate student achievement", interviewees were asked how they had interpreted the question, not how they had answered. As with the "what has happened" part of the survey, interviewees were invited to speak freely on any item of interest to them as well as directly address those items for which the study wished additional information from the interview - ees regarding their answers and their interpreta - tions of some items.

Summary

The interview format was structured to perform a validation function, as well as to determine: (a) whether the questions were clear to the respondents, (b) whether the respondents had additional ideas regarding what ought to happen now in student evaluation, and (c) what reasons respondents had for their answers to key questions.

Generally the findings gleaned from personal interviews support the information gathered from all non-student respondents through the questionnaire. As well, comments made by the interviewees are thematically the same as those made by the total population.

Interviewees as a group want to see some change effected in the way grade 12 students are presently being evaluated. The "non-educational" group would like to see a return to some type of external examination scheme, but would prefer a system that involved a mixture of teacher marks and government examination marks. If such a move were taken, these interviewees would object to the sole reliance on the multiple choice format.

Finally, the interview results validate the questionnaire finding that the large majority of the people who want to see a return to compulsory examinations perceived that the quality of education is worse today than five years ago. Generally speaking, those interviewees who want to return to the "old system" of examinations are dissatisfied with provincial standards, regard student motivation as inadequate, grades as inflated and the curriculum too free. Those

opposed to compulsory examinations think that whatever problems exist cannot be resolved, or may be made worse by returning to department - als.

PART II STUDY CONCLUSIO

SECTION I

STUDY CONCLUSIONS and COMMENTARY by

STUDY STEERING COMMITTEE

Study conclusions

There is no easy answer to a question as complex as that posed by the Legislative Assembly, since part of the answer depends on which concept of "quality" one has in mind. Implicit in the question is the notion that it might be restated as "all things being equal", has there been a change in student achievement caused by the withdrawal of compulsory departmental examinations? Of course all other things cannot be equal. There have been many changes in society in general, and in the educational scene in particular that could have affected student achievement. Some of these changes would include changes in curriculum, changes in the pool of knowledge and changes in life style. To isolate the effects of examination withdrawal is an impossible task.

If "quality of education" means the amount that students know, or their abilities to reason or create, then the Study concludes from available data that the question cannot be answered. No data exist upon which a valid comparison can be made. Within the short period available the Study was unable to administer copies of examinations which would represent the content covered by examinations administered by the department. Indeed, there is some doubt that such examinations would provide a fair comparison in view of changes in curriculum that have taken place.

IS and RECOMMENDATION

If "quality of education" means standards of student achievement, then the Study finds that an answer can be attempted. Taking the narrow definition of standard of achievement as a letter grade A, B, C, D, F, performance rating or pass versus fail, and assuming that the inherent level of ability of Alberta students remains about the same from one year to the next, it is the Study's conclusion that in most school districts and in most subjects, relatively more "A" grades are awarded now than prior to the withdrawal of compulsory departmental examinations. In other words, one of the consequences of the withdrawal of departmental examinations has been "grade inflation".

If "quality of education" is taken to mean the perceptions of people in Alberta about the "quality of education", the Study finds that changes in the "quality of education" have taken place. It appears that most Albertans think that there has been a reduction in student effort, an increase in the opportunity to adapt curriculum to local needs, an increase in professional freedom and responsibility, a general decrease in the level of achievement and a reduction in comparability of grading practices. However, although the majority of Albertans appear to perceive that "quality of education" has changed, those most closely associated with the educational community tend to have a more optimistic view of the direction of change than members of the public at large. Few respondents saw the withdrawal of examinations as the most important factor in bringing about the changes, but the public appears to attribute more importance to it than did groups such as teachers and principals.

Study Steering Committee Commentary

The Study Steering Committee found it difficult to establish the relative values of these changes. For some members of the Committee, the potential engendered by increased curricular flexibility outweighs the lack of provincial benchmarks. For others, the perceived reduction in student effort is a primary issue. These examples of differences in viewpoints amongst the Study Steering Committee members reflect the many divergent views of most Albertans. Many conditions have affected the quality of education in Alberta since the withdrawal of departmental examinations. Although members of the Committee have differing views on the importance of such examinations, the Committee is united in its belief that bringing back the examinations will not necessarity return the situation to what it was. The Committee agrees also that the Study provides evidence of a loss of public confidence in the educational system over the past few years, and that there is likely some basis for this loss. The impact of public confidence upon education cannot be ignored. Because of the perceived decline in actual achievement as opposed to the rise in marks, because of the general decline in public confidence in the educational system, and because there is always room for improvement of educational practices, the Committee believes that steps must be taken to improve the quality of education and particularly the procedures for evaluation.

SECTION II

MACOSA CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

In viewing the findings of the Grade 12 Examinations Study, **The Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement** recognizes that there is serious concern about educational quality. The groups involved in the study definitely desire that something be done about educational quality. At the same time there is considerable reluctance on the part of the various publics to return to the pre-1973 form of examinations. Though the system of accreditation is not working as well as it might, the **Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement** believes that the system can be made to work. Therefore, the Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement recommends:

THAT THE MINISTER EXTEND THE PROVISIONS OF THE EXISTING ACCREDITATION POLICY FOR A MINIMUM OF THREE YEARS, SUBJECT TO REVIEW AFTER THAT PERIOD, AND FURTHER THAT THE NECESSARY STEPS BE TAKEN TO ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EXISTING POLICY WITH RESPECT TO STUDENT EVALUATION.

The Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement regards this recommendation as interim and general. Further studies presently in progress will provide specific information as to some of the necessary steps that should be taken to enhance the effectiveness of the existing policy.